

P A R T T W O

THE FEATURES OF THE WORLD

Round each habitation hovering,
See the cloud and fire appear
For a glory and a covering,
Showing that the Lord is near;
Thus deriving from their banner
Light by night and shade by day,
Safe they feed upon the manna
Which he gives them when they pray.

—John Newton

F O U R

THE WORLD AS GOD'S HOUSE

Suppose we were going to build a house. What would be our first step? Imagine that we bought some land, and then went out and bought some materials. We all came out to the land one day and started putting it together with no pre-arranged plan. We started nailing boards together, pouring concrete, laying pipes, and all the rest, according to our whims. What kind of building would we erect, if we could get anything up at all?

Clearly something else is needed: a blueprint. We need to go to an architect and have him draw up a blueprint, a model, for us to work from. We also need to come up with a schedule of what is done first, and what is done later. Then we can get together and build the house properly. The Bible tells us that man is God's image and workman, taking the raw materials of the world and building civilizations from it. As a worker, man needs a blueprint and a schedule; that is, he needs a worldview and a philosophy of history. In general, these are provided by the Scriptures: The Bible tells us what to do and how to do it in the transforming power of the Spirit. In terms of a worldview *model*, however, the Bible shows heaven as the blueprint for earth. Heaven as a model for the earth is presented to us in Genesis 1.

The Heavenly Blueprint

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth," says Genesis 1:1.¹ This heaven is the "highest" or "third" heaven. In Genesis 1:8, God created the "firmament" within the earth, and called it "heaven." The stars were placed in this "firmament heaven," and birds are said to fly in it (Genesis 1:17, 20). Thus,

neither the atmospheric heavens nor "outer space" were established until later in the week, and are actually part of the original "earth" of Genesis 1:1.

The heaven created in Genesis 1:1, then, is the special throne-house of God. "Thus says the LORD, 'Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool'" (Isaiah 66:1; cf. Psalm 11:4; Matthew 5:34; 23:22; Acts 7:49). It exists (to use the language of science fiction) in another dimension from earth, infinitely near to us, yet also infinitely far away.

The Bible shows us quite a lot about heaven. In fact, if we do not understand heaven, we cannot do our work here on earth; for we pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." If we do not know what heaven is like, we cannot imitate it on earth. Thus the Bible frequently opens heaven to give man a view of what it is like. Ezekiel's visions of the divine Glory (Ezekiel 1:1ff.; 3:12ff.; 10:1ff.; 11:22ff.; 43:2ff.) are a good place to start. As we shall see, the "glory-cloud" of God is a picture of heaven; when it appears, we get a view of heaven.²

It is when heaven is opened that the Law of God is revealed. But more than that, the heavenly pattern Moses was shown on Mount Sinai included art, architecture, worship, and indeed all of life. The Tabernacle and the Temple were both architectural heaven-models.³ Similarly, in the book of Revelation, John is shown how worship is conducted in heaven, as a model for earthly worship.⁴ Thus, heaven is the model or blueprint for earth, though not in a simplistic sense. After all, the Tabernacle and the Temple were not identical. There is unity and diversity in man's imitation of heaven. Man is to labor to take the raw material of the earth and remodel it according to the heavenly blueprint: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

This explains to us why God would initially create two different environments, rather than just one. Man was created to act as God's agent, His son, in the world. Man was going to be given the delightful task of transfiguring the world from glory to glory according to the heavenly model.

Glory and Heaven

The second verse of the Bible tells us that darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit was also hovering over the surface of the waters. While there is a "contest" between the do-

minion of darkness and that of the Spirit here on the first day, this is not a conflict between evil and good. Darkness was not an environment of evil, nor a symbol of sin, at this stage. Rather the idea is that the Spirit was beginning the work of glorifying the creation.

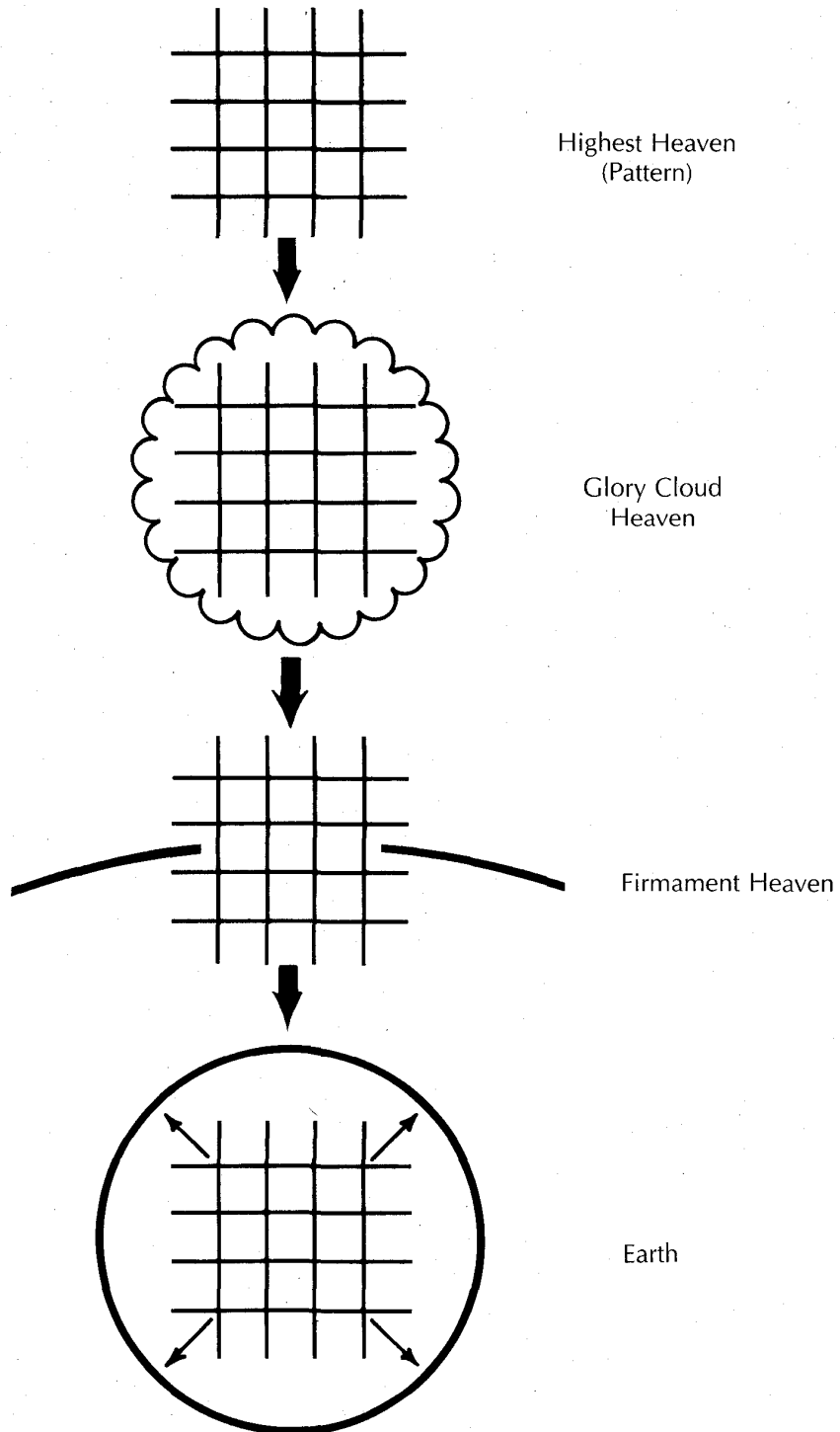
The hovering Spirit manifested the presence of the Triune God in creation. It is the Spirit who *proceeds* eternally from the Father and also from the Son (in two different ways, according to the properties of each spirating Person). Once the world has been created, it is the Spirit who *proceeds* out of eternity into time, and makes manifest the presence of the other two Persons. The Father and the Word send the Spirit into the creation as initial Light-bearer.

Genesis 1:3 records the creation of the cloud of glory, also called Shekinah Glory: "Let there be light." Light implies transmission from some source, with the possibility of shadowing. Moreover, the light was not constant, but alternated with darkness for three days before the creation of the sun. Thus, there had to be some local source of this created light, and it was not the sun.

As Meredith G. Kline has shown at length, the visible manifestation of God's throne-environment in the creation is always the work of the Spirit. Thus the hovering Spirit in Genesis 1:2 corresponds to the hovering cloud-chariot of God elsewhere in the Bible, as in Deuteronomy 32:10-11, where the glory of God hovered over Israel in the wilderness.⁵ Until God spoke from His throne and said, "Let there be light," there was no visible manifestation of glory in connection with the Spirit.

When God's glory-cloud appears later in the Bible, we find that it consists of such basic heavenly phenomena as light, clouds, lightning, thunder, blue sky, and the like. Here in Genesis 1:2-3 is the explanation of this. God first created heaven, and then sent His Spirit to hover over the earth. Proceeding from heaven, the Spirit brought the heavenly pattern into the cosmos. With the creation of light, the Spirit manifested God's presence as a cloud of glory. In the design of God, this glory was reproduced in the firmament heavens made on the second day, and then was further reproduced in successive stages, on the earth. (See Diagram 4.1.) "The heavens declare the glory of God in the special sense that they are a copy of the archetypal Glory of God."⁶

Diagram 4.1
The Heavens and the Earth



When men saw the glory-cloud, they were seeing heaven, or at least a replica of heaven in the world. As Kline has noted, "The Glory-cloud was indeed the invisible realm of heaven appearing in a veiled visibility in the midst of earthly creatures."⁷ The phenomena of the glory were heavenly phenomena. To see into the cloud was to see into heaven. Genesis 1 explains that the hovering Spirit proceeded from heaven to make this glory-light appear within the world. In this way, the Spirit brought a blueprint with Him, and began the work of shaping the world after the heavenly model.⁸

We pray "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Genesis 1 gives us the first fulfillment of this principle. As the light shone from the glory-cloud of God's heavenly throne environment, that environment began to be reproduced on the earth. God spent one week laying the initial foundations and showing man how to work. Just as man labors to make earth like heaven, so did God.

The Firmament-Heaven

After making light, God created a "firmament" to separate waters above from waters below (Genesis 1:6, 7). This firmament He called *heaven*. We now have two heavens, the one the dwelling place of God and the angels, made on the first day, and the second created *within the original earth* as a reminder of the original heaven. The fact that the word *heaven* is used for the firmament means that the firmament is analogous to the original heaven, and thus is symbolic of it. On the fourth day, God placed lights *in* the firmament-heaven, to be symbols and to act as clocks (Genesis 1:14-18). This means that the sun, moon, and stars are not part of the original heaven, but part of the original earth. The original earth of Genesis 1:1 is now being separated into the globe on which we live on the one hand, and upper waters and lights on the other hand. On the fifth day, God created birds to fly *on the face of* the firmament-heaven (Genesis 1:20).

What is this firmament-heaven? The related verb in Hebrew means "to stretch out, beat out, or flatten out." The idea is of a shell or surface cast over the earth.⁹ Now as a matter of scientific fact, there is no hard shell around the earth, nor do birds fly in-

side a hard shell. We have here the language of visible appearance, not of scientific investigation. Thus, we need to see the language as pointing to a symbolic structure. The blue sky (firmament) is a symbolic boundary between waters above and waters below. Looking at the sky, we see an image of heaven. The things found in the sky—stars, birds—symbolize things found in heaven—angels (e.g., Job 38:7; Revelation 12:4; 18:2; John 1:32).

To paraphrase what Genesis 1 says about the firmament-heaven, we can say that God created the appearance of a shell to separate the (blue) waters above from the (blue) waters below. This shell symbolizes the boundary between heaven and the heavenly sea (Revelation 4:6) and earth. If we look up at this blue shell, it looks as if the “greater light and the lesser light” and the stars are fixed *in* the shell. As we look up, it appears that the birds fly *on the face of*, or in front of the surface of this blue shell. Neither the atmosphere nor outer space, however, but the shell itself is the firmament-heaven.

Why is this shell called “heaven”? Because the phenomena that appear in the sky are signs and symbols of things in the original heaven. Clouds remind us of God’s glory-cloud. Rainbows remind us of the rainbow around His throne. Stars speak of angels. The sun speaks of Christ. The blue speaks of the heavenly sea before the Throne. And so forth. (Cf. Psalm 19:1; Daniel 12:3.)

The firmament is best situated to show heaven to us because it is the symbolic boundary between heaven and earth. It is as if the shell were translucent, and we can see dimly through it into heaven—through a glass darkly. Thus, when Moses and the elders ascended the mountain to eat with God, “they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky [heaven] itself” (Exodus 24:10). The blue sapphire pavement is the firmament, which here becomes temporarily transparent enough to enable the elders to see the King of kings. The same picture is given in Ezekiel 1:22-26, where the cherubim are positioned just under the firmament, to carry out God’s will in the world, while God is enthroned above the firmament-boundary.

What we have seen thus far is that heaven forms the model for the earth—socially, artistically, morally, spiritually, and in every other way. The Spirit initiated the task of shaping the earth after the heavenly model. But we have also seen that God set the sky within the earth as a symbol of His highest heaven. The creation of the firmament-heaven, visible to man, means in part that man, like the Spirit, will work at shaping the world after the heavenly model. The highest heaven is invisible to us, but the firmament-heaven gives us a visible blueprint.

The fact that the firmament-heaven contains images of heaven (stars, birds, rainbows) is delightful and wonderful, but it does not carry us very far in terms of a descriptive program. It is the Bible, God's Word, that is our primary blueprint. Since heaven is the blueprint, the Bible is a heavenly book. The Bible teaches this in imagery, for we read that the sky is like a scroll (Isaiah 34:4; Revelation 6:14). This relates to the very word *firmament*, which as we saw refers to something stretched or beaten out, like a scroll.

The primary passage that relates heaven to the Bible as our blueprint is Psalm 19. The first six verses of the psalm have to do with the heavens, which "are telling of the glory of God; and the firmament is declaring the work of His hands." Having celebrated the visible revelation of God's glory in the heavens, the psalmist then celebrates the Law-Word of God in verses 7-11. The relationship is clear: The "speech" that is poured forth from the heavens is found in the Bible.

Thus, in terms of the Biblical worldview, the blue sky and all that it contains are to remind us of God, of His Word, and of our wonderful project of "heavenizing" the earth.

Seeing God's Glory

When Israel came out of Egypt, they grumbled against Moses and Aaron because they did not have anything to eat. Moses and Aaron called the people together and told them that God would provide them heavenly bread, manna, and that

in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD. . . . And it came about as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, that they turned toward the wilderness, and

behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud (Exodus 16:7, 10).

They had seen this glory before. As they marched out of Egypt,

the LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day, or the pillar of fire by night, from before the people (Exodus 13:21-22).

This was almost certainly only one pillar. During the day, the brightness of the sun hid the fire within, and Israel saw the cloud. At night, the fire shone through the cloud. Thus, they were given shade by day and warmth at night.

This glory-cloud settled over Mount Sinai.

And there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound . . . and Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire, and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently (Exodus 19:16, 18).

The One seated on His throne in the midst of this "portable heaven" then spoke the Ten Commandments to Israel (Exodus 20).

God told Israel to build a house for Him, a tent called the Tabernacle. Since the glory-cloud was God's portable heaven, and thus His house, we expect the Tabernacle to be an architectural replica of the glory-cloud of heaven. This is indeed what we find. Once the Tabernacle was completed, God moved into it; and His glory-cloud filled it, identifying with it: "Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the Tabernacle" (Exodus 40:34).

Later on in history, God gave blueprints to David for a more permanent house for His Name, the Temple (1 Chronicles 28:19). Again, when the Temple, a model of God's heavenly house, had been completed, "the cloud filled the house of the LORD" (1 Kings 8:10).

Still later, when the Temple was about to be destroyed, God's glory appeared to Ezekiel in Babylon. God told Ezekiel that He was moving out of the Temple, and was going to reside in exile with His people (Ezekiel 8-11). Ezekiel was granted a vision through the blue firmament into the cloud, and what he saw was a chariot made of four cherubim with wheels, surrounded by a rainbow: God's portable throne (Ezekiel 1:4-28). Earlier, Isaiah had had a similar vision of God's heavenly, cloud-filled throne-room (Isaiah 6:1-4).

Last, but certainly not least, the apostle John was caught up into the cloud, and into heaven itself, where he stood on the firmament and saw the throne of God and all sorts of heavenly phenomena (Revelation 4-5).¹⁰

In Chapters 12-18 of this book, we shall examine these various heaven models in detail, because they were also pictures of the world. Remember, heaven is the model for the earth. Each of these symbolic pictures was given to teach the people of that time how they were to live and relate to God. Accompanying each visual blueprint were words from God, verbal blueprints. It was man's task to build the world, carrying it from glory to glory, and making it a fit house for God. God dwells in heaven, but He wants also to dwell on earth, when man has made it ready for Him. Heaven is God's throne-house, but potentially, so is the earth. The blueprint for God's earth-house is heaven.

Typology

The Greek word *typos* refers to an image impressed onto something else, for instance, wax.¹¹ It is the word used in Scripture for the imprint of God's heavenly pattern on the earth, and thus it is absolutely fundamental to a Biblical worldview.

In Acts 7:44 Stephen says, "Our fathers had the Tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, just as He who spoke to Moses directed him to make it according to the pattern [type] which he had seen." Similarly, Hebrews 8:5, quoting Exodus 25:40, reminds us that Moses was told, "See that you make all things according to the pattern [type] which was shown you on the mountain."

As we have seen, there are a succession of such imprints. Each imprint is more glorious than the one before. Solomon's Temple was more glorious than the Mosaic Tabernacle. Ezekiel's

visionary Temple (Ezekiel 40-48) was more glorious than Solomon's Temple. The New Jerusalem is more glorious yet. The study of how each of these models is transformed into the next, and the parallels between them, is part of typology.

Because all men are made in the image of God, all men bear His imprint. Every man is, thus, in one sense a type of every other man. More importantly, church leaders are to be types or models for kingdom citizens (Philippians 1:7; 1 Thessalonians 1:7; 1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7; 1 Peter 5:3). In terms of a typological view of history, the kingdom of men in the Old Covenant was a type of the New Covenant (1 Corinthians 10:6, 11), and the first Adam was a type of the Last (Romans 5:14).

A great deal of nonsense has been published under the banner of typology; but in spite of this, the fact remains that typology is the fundamental Biblical philosophy of history.¹² Typology means that history is under God's control, not man's. It means that the successive stages of world history have meaning, a meaning related to the heavenly pattern and God's purpose to glorify man and the world progressively.

In an important study, Jean Daniélou has shown that the early Church Fathers regarded typology as central to their understanding of the Scriptures. It enabled them to answer both their Jewish and their Gnostic critics. Against the Jews, typology showed the superiority of the New Covenant over the old; against the Gnostics, typology showed that the Old and New Covenants both revealed the same truths.¹³ The symbolic and typological approach of the Church Fathers is often confused with allegory, but Daniélou shows conclusively that the Fathers were well aware of the difference. The Fathers did indeed use the Bible allegorically to express what they intended to be a Christian philosophy, but

this trend, strictly philosophical, is something quite different from typology. It goes back to Philo. In his *Treatise on Paradise*, Ambrose, who was much influenced by Philo, writes as follows: "Philo confined his attention to the moral sense, because his Judaic outlook prevented him from a more spiritual understanding" (IV, 25; C.S.E.L. 281, 21). *Spiritual* here denotes the Christological or typological sense, while *moral* implies philoso-

phical allegory. What Ambrose calls the moral sense is therefore something entirely different from typology.¹⁴

Eventually, however, "Christian philosophy freed itself from an allegorism which artificially tied it to the Bible, and became an independent approach."¹⁵

Herbert Schlossberg has written, "All idols belong either to nature or to history. The whole creation falls into these two categories, and there is no other place to which man can turn to find a substitute for God."¹⁶ The Biblical symbolic worldview answers man's idols of nature. Only if we allow nature to point us to the Creator can we avoid idolatry. Just so, the Biblical typological worldview answers man's idols of history. God superintends history so that events of the past shed light on events of the future. The key to unlocking the meaning of history lies in the typological blueprint of heaven, as heaven progressively is impressed upon the earth, and as the Heavenly Man, Jesus Christ, is progressively impressed upon His people.¹⁷

Conclusion

When we step outside and look up, what do we see? We see the blue sky of day, and the black starry sky of night. We see clouds and heavenly fire (lightning). We see rainbows and falling stars. We hear thunder. The Bible tells us that these are not merely natural phenomena. They are pictures of heaven, revelations of God's glory, dimensions of His home. With new eyes, we can see this world also as God's house.

The spacious firmament on high,
With all the blue ethereal sky,
And spangled heavens, a shining frame,
Their great Original proclaim.
The unwearied sun from day to day
Does his Creator's power display,
And publishes to every land
The works of an almighty hand.

Soon as the evening shades prevail
The moon takes up the wondrous tale,
And nightly to the listening earth
Repeats the story of her birth;
Whilst all the stars that round her burn
And all the planets in their turn,
Confirm the tidings, as they roll,
And spread the truth from pole to pole.

What though in solemn silence all
Move round the dark terrestrial ball;
What though no real voice nor sound
Amid their radiant orbs be found;
In reason's ear they all rejoice,
And utter forth a glorious voice;
Forever singing as they shine,
"The hand that made us is divine."

—Joseph Addison

F I V E

SUN, MOON, AND STARS

When twentieth-century people step outside and look at the sky, they see a huge atomic furnace burning hydrogen during the day, and a small planetoid reflecting the light of the sun at night. They also see other atomic furnaces that appear very small because they are so far away.

When twentieth-century people step back inside their homes and pick up the latest coffee table book of astronomy, they see color-enhanced photographs of distant galaxies, the Magellanic Clouds, and binary stars. They see speculative drawings of quasars, neutron stars, and black holes.

All these are wondrous things, and proper to study as part of God's universe. But if this is all we see, we are not getting the whole picture. If we look through new eyes, we shall see much more.

The Purpose of Heavenly Lights

The Bible speaks more of the purpose of the heavenly lights than it does of their constitution:

Then God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs, and for seasons [festival times], and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth"; and it was so.

And God made the two great lights; the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night; He made the stars also. And God placed them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth, and to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness; and God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1:14-18)

The first thing said about the astral bodies is that they are lights. We have seen that light is an aspect of God's glory-cloud, and it is as a reflection of God's glory that these heavenly bodies are made as lights. They represent glory, and so the Bible can say of the glorified saints that "the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matthew 13:43). Similarly, Solomon wrote, "Who is this that grows like the dawn, as beautiful as the full moon, as pure as the sun?" (Song of Solomon 6:10). Or as St. Paul wrote, "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory" (1 Corinthians 15:41).

It is because the heavenly bodies show God's glory that we delight in looking at beautiful pictures of them in astronomy books. We live in a happy age, to have access to photographs of such wonders as the Ring Nebula, the Crab Nebula, and the great spiral nebula in Andromeda.

As lights, the astral bodies are glorious. But, *second, they were given for signs, or symbols.* As we have seen, all created things point back to God; but all things also symbolize particular things, and in this case, the astral bodies symbolize rulers and governors. The lights are positioned in the firmament, called heaven. Heaven rules the earth. Thus, those things positioned in the firmament symbolize rulers of the earth, as we shall see shortly.

Third, they are said to be for seasons, or, more literally, for festival times. This applied to the Old Covenant, which was regulated by these creational clocks. It was particularly the moon, regulator of months, that governed the Israelite calendar. The moon established which day was the first of the month, and which was the fifteenth. Such festivals as Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles were set on particular days of the month (Leviticus 23:5-6, 34; Numbers 28:11-14; 2 Chronicles 8:13; Psalm 81:3). The moon, of course, governs the night (Psalm 136:9; Jeremiah 31:35), and in a sense the entire Old Covenant took place at night. With the rising of the Sun of Righteousness (Malachi 4:2), the "day" of the Lord is at hand (Malachi 4:1), and in a sense the New Covenant takes place in the daytime.¹ As Genesis 1 says over and over, first evening and then morning. In the New Covenant we are no longer under lunar regulation for festival times (Colossians 2:16-17). In that regard, Christ is our light.

Diagram 5.1
Sun, Moon, Stars

If we compare Genesis 1:14 and 16 we see employed the literary device known as *chiasm*. A chiasm is a literary device in which parallel ideas or terms are presented in a sandwich form instead of normal parallelism; that is, ABCDDCBA instead of AABCCDD. The use of chiasm, which helps bring out the particular symbolic associations of sun, moon, and stars:

- A 14. Let them be for signs
- B 14. And for festival times
- C 14. And for days and years
- C' 16. The greater light to govern the day
- B' 16. And the lesser light to govern the night
- A' 16. The stars also

The stars (A) are primarily associated with astral symbolism. The moon (B) is associated with appointed festivals, which began in the evening and were removed in the New Covenant. The sun (C) is associated with days and years.

Fourth, they are said to be clocks for days and years. Long before our mechanical clocks and watches were invented, people told time by the position of the sun, the occurrence of solar equinoxes and solstices, and the precession of the equinoxes. Particularly mentioned are days and years, which are regulated not by the moon but by the sun.

Fifth, they are said to rule over day and night, to govern time. Here again the emphasis is on rule. The astral bodies signified those who are glorified and exalted. While this is true of all the saints, it is also true of all human rulers as well. Revelation 1:20 says that the rulers of the church are like stars, and Jude 13 says that apostate teachers are "wandering stars." Long before this, in Genesis 37:9-10, Joseph had seen the rulers of his clan as sun, moon, and stars. We see this even today. The flag of the United States of America has fifty stars, for the fifty states of our nation. The flags of oriental nations include the rising sun. The flags of Near-Eastern countries feature a crescent moon. Sun, moon, and stars are symbols of world powers.

Sixth, they are associated with the heavenly host, the angelic and human array around the throne of God. This also follows from the fact that they are positioned in heaven. They represent the angelic host in Judges 5:20, Job 38:7, and Isaiah 14:13. They represent the human host of the Lord as well, as we see from the promise

to Abraham in Genesis 15:5, reiterated in Genesis 22:17, 26:4, and Deuteronomy 1:10. Christians “appear as stars in the world in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation” (Philippians 2:15). The fact that Abraham’s descendants were to be like stars implies that they would not only be positioned in the heavenlies (Ephesians 2:6), but also that they would be *rulers* over the gentiles.

Now, it is neither possible nor desirable to separate these aspects of astral symbolism. The sun, moon, and stars mark time as clocks. Since they mark time, they govern time. Positioned in the heavenlies, they signify governments, ruling day and night. Since they mark time, they can be seen to signify the duration of earthly governments, so that as we shall see the fall of sun, moon, and stars is a symbol for the fall of earthly governments.

Let us now look at these things in more detail.

The Sun

The sun, ruler of the sky and of the day, is used to symbolize the Lord in Psalm 84:11, “The Lord God is a sun and shield.” Similarly, a familiar passage in Isaiah says,

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness will cover the earth, and deep darkness the peoples; but the Lord will rise upon you, and His glory will appear upon you. And nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising (60:1-3).

God is like the sun, and when He comes, He glorifies His people so that they also shine. So Deborah could pray, “Let those who love Him [God] be like the rising of the sun in its might” (Judges 5:31b), a prayer answered a few years later in Gideon, and then again in Samson, whose name means “Sun.”² Psalm 19 reflects on this: The sun is like a bridegroom, like a strong man. The reference here, first of all, is to Samson, the bridegroom of Judges 14-15. But beyond this we see the Messianic Judge of all the earth, who is to come and bring His Word (vv. 7-11). When John saw that One, “His face was like the sun shining in its strength” (Revelation 1:16b).³

Night gives way to day, and this is an image of the coming of the Kingdom. If Nicodemus met with Jesus by night, this was in part a reflection of the condition of history at that point, for the

whole Old Covenant is seen as nighttime. Malachi 4:1 says that a "day is coming," and goes on in verse 2 to predict that "the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in its wings." In this way, moon and sun are governors of time, of the Old Covenant and New Covenant; but they also symbolize the First and Last Adams, who are the real governors of these two eras.

Finally, we should note that in the Bible the sun can also symbolize counterfeit gods, those who falsely pretend to be the true Sun of Righteousness. The Pharaoh of Egypt claimed to be an incarnation of the sun, and thus it was appropriate that in the judgment of Egypt, God put out the sun for three days (Exodus 10:21-23).

The Stars

The prophets often see the "sun, moon, and stars" falling to the earth. One of the most frequently encountered mistakes in Bible prophecy today is the notion that this always refers to the end of the world at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Actually, though, this expression usually refers to the collapse of some particular nation.

Suppose we wrote a prophetic poem about the destruction of the United States, and included in the poem these lines:

The sun was darkened, the moon eclipsed;
The stars fell, they fell to the ground;
Fifty in ranks, trampled under foot;
Her rulers imprisoned, caged in darkness.

Let's analyze this section of our "poem." It has an ABBA structure, which (as we saw above) is a "chiasm." The first line, about the darkening of sun and moon, is explained by the last line about the imprisonment of our rulers. The second and third lines clearly refer to the defeat of the fifty states. This would be fairly obvious to us, would it not? Anyone who has had a high school class in literature could probably figure it out.

With this in mind, let us begin a survey of the Biblical passages that use sun, moon, and stars as symbols of rulers and times.

Abraham's Stars

In Genesis 15, when God cut the covenant with Abraham, He took him outside and told him to "tell" the stars, "if you are able to tell them; thus shall your seed be" (v. 5). Bible exegetes differ on exactly what Abraham was being asked to do. Generally it is assumed that he was being asked to count up the number of the stars, and that his descendants would be like the stars of the heavens for multitude, even as they would be like the sand of the sea. Some have pointed out, however, that the Hebrew verb translated "count" can also be translated "tell" in the sense of "evaluating" (Hebrew *saphar*, as in Psalm 56:8). This is not clearly the case, however, since the verb often just means "count up."

All the same, two alternative interpretations have been suggested. The first is that of M. Barnouin. Barnouin points out that the patriarchs in Genesis 5 and 11 lived lives of curious numerical lengths. Enoch, for instance, lived 365 years, the length of a solar year. Kenan lived 910 years, ten times a standard quarter year of 91 days. Lamech lived 777 years, which is the sum of the synodical periods of Jupiter (399 days) and Saturn (378 days) (Genesis 5:23, 14, 31). Is it possible that God was saying to Abraham that his seed would be like the great patriarchs of old, the faithful godly men who were blessed and preserved before the Flood, and in the years after the Flood?

Barnouin suggests that when Abraham looked at the stars, he was considering the planets and how they *govern time* (Genesis 1:14), and making an evaluation based on this. The years of the patriarchs corresponded to the time-governing periods of the planets and other heavenly bodies. Abraham's seed would be like this. They would be a heavenly people, gathered around God's heavenly throne. Their history would mark time.

Barnouin sees this fulfilled in the censuses of the book of Numbers, in which these same astral periods recur. In Numbers 1, all the men twenty and older were enrolled in the Israelite militia, God's army. As God's army, Israel was in one sense a "heavenly host," captained by the Lord of heaven. In this respect, they are spoken of as stars in Deuteronomy 1:10, and as a heavenly host they are commanded by an angel, the Angel of the Lord (Joshua 5:13-6:2; Exodus 23:20-21). Thus, it would not be surprising if the numbering of that heavenly host had some

association with astral numbers. At any rate, Barnouin's thesis is a complex one, but certainly also a challenging one.⁴

The second alternative view of Genesis 15:5 relates to the constellations of the zodiac, and we shall defer consideration of it until after we examine Genesis 37:5-10.

To conclude our look at Abraham, let me point out that when God made the covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15, He did so by burying the sun and making it "very dark" (Genesis 15:17). This implies that if the "seed" is to be like the stars of heaven and dust of earth, it will have to be a new heavens and a new earth.

Joseph's Stars

When Joseph saw twelve stars bowing down before him, could this have been the constellations of the zodiac, and not individual stars? In this section, we want to focus on the *possibility* (please note) that the twelve signs of the zodiac *may* have been designed by God as twelve portraits of humanity, and that they *may* correlate with the twelve tribes of Israel (which clearly were twelve portraits of humanity).

This is not a new idea. Synagogues dug up in Israel have been found to have tiled mosaics showing the twelve signs of the zodiac, and Josephus relates this to the twelve tribes.⁵ Before looking at this, however, let us get before us what the Bible says about the constellations.

The constellations are referred to several times in Scripture, without any implied criticism, simply as if they were part of the created order of things. An example is Job 38:31-33, where God says to Job,

Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades, or loose the cords of Orion? Can you lead forth a constellation (or, the zodiac) in its season, and guide the Bear with her sons? Do you know the ordinances of the heavens, or fix their rule over the earth?

This is an interesting passage, for it speaks of the chains and cords of the astral signs. After all, everyone who has ever learned the constellations knows that they don't in the least resemble what they are supposed to look like. It takes a lot of imagination to tie together the stars in these symbols. Who, then, devised

them in the first place? Who set up the chains and cords that bind them together? If they were set up by heathen Babylonian priests, why does God refer to them as if they were His creations?

Job 9:9, speaking of God's greatness, says that He "makes the Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades, and the Chambers of the South." It certainly seems that this verse says that God Himself designed the constellations. Amos 5:8 says the same thing: "He who made the Pleiades and Orion . . . the LORD is His name." It might be argued that God made the unnamed stars, and men designed the constellations, but I find that to be a strained interpretation. It seems to me that Job and Amos would in that case just have said that God made the stars, and left it at that. To say God made the constellations certainly implies that He designed them.

Another avenue of evidence points in the same direction. Psalm 147:4 says that God "counts the number of the stars; He *gives names* to all of them" (emphasis added). Similarly, Isaiah 40:26 encourages us to lift up our eyes "and see who has created these stars, the One who leads forth their host by number, He *calls them all by name*" (emphasis added). Does the Bible tell us any of these names? It would seem so, as we have seen: Bear, Orion, Pleiades, etc. Maybe, of course, the constellations are not what Psalm 147:4 and Isaiah 40:26 are talking about. Maybe these verses are just talking about individual stars, in which case we simply don't know any of their names. Maybe. But again, this is not the simplest and most obvious interpretation. Comparing Scripture with Scripture, it seems that God named the constellations.

Some passages allude to the misuse of the constellations by idolaters. Second Kings 23:5 refers to apostate Israelites who burned incense to Baal, the sun and the moon, and the constellations. Similarly, Isaiah 13:10a, speaking of the destruction of Babylon, says that "the stars of the heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light." It is likely that the constellations are included in this judgment because of their misuse in Babylonian astrology.

With this in mind, let me lay out a series of propositions. *First*, it appears that God designed the major constellations, both those of the zodiac and the circumpolar ones (Bear and Serpent, Job 26:13). It seems that this is part of what Genesis 1:14 means when it says God made the stars as signs.

Second, clearly the Bible is opposed to the *abuse* of the constellations for idolatrous or astrological purposes, to tell fortunes and the like (Deuteronomy 18:9-13; Isaiah 8:19-20; 44:24-25; 47:8-15).

Third, I know of no evidence to support the notion that the precession of the equinoxes and the 2,000-year-long periods of time that they introduce (Age of Pisces, Age of Aquarius) are used by any Biblical passage to structure either history or prophecy. As a way of marking time, the precession of the equinoxes is part of God's universal clock system, but it seems to have no special symbolic significance.

Fourth, I find no Biblical evidence to support the popular notion that the twelve signs of the zodiac are a map of Bible history and prophecy, beginning with Virgo and ending with Leo. This has been the most common evangelical/fundamentalist use of the zodiac in popular literature. Abraham's analysis of the stars is explained this way: Abraham looked at the cycle of the constellations and received a picture of prophetic history and of the coming Redeemer.⁶ I can find, however, no foundation for this approach to the zodiac in Scripture.

Fifth, it is a fact, however, that the four faces of the cherubim in Ezekiel and Revelation correspond to the four central constellations in the zodiac, and to the four tribes of Israel that were positioned north, south, east, and west of the Tabernacle in the wilderness (Numbers 2:1-34). The Lion is Leo, Judah (Genesis 49:9). The Bull is Taurus, Ephraim (Deuteronomy 33:17). The Man is Aquarius, Reuben, "unstable as water" (Genesis 49:4). The Eagle is Scorpio, Dan. (This last identification is more difficult until we understand two things. First, Scorpio was also drawn as an Eagle in the ancient world, according to R. H. Allen.⁷ Second, the scorpion is linked with the serpent, and Dan is the serpent [Genesis 49:17; Luke 10:17-19].)

With this paradigm in mind, it is possible to draw a diagram of the twelve tribes in the wilderness, and link the other tribes with the other zodiacal signs by going to the right and left of each of the four major (cherubic) signs. A correlation of these signs with the prophecies of Jacob and Moses in Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 would prove most interesting, but we have no time for it here.⁸

In conclusion, when Joseph saw the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowing down to him (Genesis 37:5-10), what do you suppose the "stars" were? It seems most likely that they were the twelve signs of the zodiac. It would be interesting to take the twelve tribes of Israel, and the preeminent symbols associated with each by Jacob and Moses, and study them as "humanity in twelve dimensions," both as revelations of sinful Adam and as adumbrations of Christ. Such a study might shed light on the relationship between the twelve tribes and the zodiac.

Prophetic Stars

Let us now briefly survey the passages where sun, moon, and stars are used in a prophetic-symbolic sense. A failure to understand the symbolic nature of these passages has led a few popular writers to assume that such expressions as "the sun turned to sackcloth and the moon to blood" can only be understood as referring to the collapse of the physical cosmos. Nobody takes these verses literally, after all. The question is, to what kind of event does this symbolic language refer? For modern man, it seems that it can only be speaking of the end of the natural world. For ancient man, it was indeed the end of the "world" that such language indicated, but not the "world" in our modern scientific sense. Rather, it was the end of the "world" in a socio-political sense.

For instance, Isaiah 13:9-10 says that "the day of the LORD is coming," and when it comes, "the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark when it rises, and the moon will not shed its light." It goes on to say in verse 13, "I shall make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken from its place at the fury of the LORD of hosts in the day of His burning anger." Well, this certainly does sound like the end of the world! *But*, if we read these verses in context, we have to change our initial impression. Verse 1 says, "The oracle concerning Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw," and if we read on, we find nothing to indicate any change in subject. It is the end of Babylon, not the end of the world, that is spoken of. In fact, in verse 17, God says that he will "stir up the Medes against them," so that the entire chapter is clearly concerned only with Babylon's destruction.

If we read Biblically, this won't seem so strange. What verse 10 is saying is that Babylon's lights are going to go out. Their clocks are going to stop. Their day is over, and it is the Day of Doom for them. And, since these astral bodies symbolize governors and rulers, their rulers are going to have their lights put out as well.

The "heavens and earth" in verse 13 refer to the socio-political organization of Babylon. The "heavens" are the aristocracy, roughly speaking, and the "earth" are the commoners.

We find the same kind of thing in Ezekiel 32. In verses 7-8 of that chapter God declares,

And when I extinguish you, I will cover the heavens, and darken their stars; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give its light. All the shining lights in the heavens I will darken over you and will set darkness on your land.

The end of the world? Yes, indeed, but not for everybody. What ancient people might God be speaking of in using this language? The idea in the Babylon oracle was that the astral bodies would not shine forth any light. Here the idea is that they will be covered over. God's glory-cloud will interpose itself between this nation and the heavenly lights. While God's glory-cloud shines brightly for His people Israel, it is dark and foreboding to His enemies, with the result that they are in darkness when He appears to them. These people experienced this once before. Their whole land was darkened; and when they pursued the Israelites, God's cloud came between them and Israel and put them in darkness (Ezekiel 32:2; cp. Exodus 10:21-23; 14:19-20).

Similar language is used prophetically concerning Israel, but with a twist. It is in the prophecy of Joel that we find this most clearly set out. Joel begins by reminding Israel of a recent plague of locusts. In his first chapter, he describes the horrors of the locust invasion. Then, in Chapter 2, he threatens the people with another locust plague, this time an invasion by human locusts. Such an invasion will be a manifestation of "the day of the LORD," that is, the day of judgment (2:1).

The expression "day" of the Lord refers to the rising of the sun—the sun of God's searching light that shows up sin and brings judgment, the sun of God's blazing heat that destroys sin.

Yet for Israel, this "day" will be a "day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness" (2:2). The metaphor is mixed, but apropos: When God brings His *day*, and evaluates their sin, He will cast them into *darkness*.

Accordingly, when God's locust army comes to judge Israel, "before them the earth quakes, the heavens tremble, the sun and the moon grow dark, and the stars lose their brightness" (2:10). This is a reference to the collapse of Israel as a body politic. After all, Abraham had been told that his seed would be like the stars of the heavens. It is possible that the quaking of the earth refers to the Israelite citizenry, the trembling of the heavens to the Levites and priests (since the Temple was a symbol of heaven), and the darkening of the astral bodies to the royal court and other rulers in Israel.

If the people repent, however, God will return to them, and restore them (2:12ff.). God promises them a great future. He promises them the coming of the Holy Spirit.

And it will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind, and your sons and daughters will prophesy [fulfilling Numbers 11:17], your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. And even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days" (Joel 2:28-29).

We know from Acts 2:16-18 that this was fulfilled at Pentecost.

"And I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth" (2:30). This is connected with Pentecost, and was, therefore, a warning to the Jews of Peter's day. Wonders in the sky and on the earth is what is foretold. In reverse order (chiasm), first we read of the earth: "Blood, fire, and columns of smoke." These are the phenomena of war. There will be war. There will be yet another invasion. This was fulfilled when the Romans invaded Palestine and destroyed Jerusalem, A.D. 66-70.

Wonders in the sky are also foretold: "the sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes" (2:31). What is of interest here is the expression "moon into blood." In a solar eclipse the sun turns black, and in a lunar eclipse the moon turns red. Thus, not merely a general darkening but an *eclipse* of powers is spoken of here. But more than that, the turning of the moon to "blood"

points, I believe, to something particularly Jewish: the sacrificial system. If they will not accept the blood of Jesus Christ, the final Sacrifice, then they themselves will be turned into blood. They will become the sacrifices. That is what the prophesied war is all about. That is what the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was all about.

But Joel is issuing a warning. Those who listen can escape.

And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the LORD will be delivered; for [just as Obadiah has already told you] "on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape" [Obadiah 17], as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls (2:32).

Just as Isaac escaped death on Mount Moriah, because of the substitute ram that God provided (Genesis 22:13), so those who trust in the Lamb of God will escape the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Such is Joel's warning, reiterated by Peter on the day of Pentecost.

It is also reiterated by John. Prophesying of this same event, the destruction of Jerusalem, John writes,

And I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind (Revelation 6:12-13).

The fig tree is a standard symbol for Israel, especially in this context (Matthew 21:19; 24:32-34; Luke 21:29-32). Both sackcloth and blood remind us of the Levitical system, the blood for sacrifices, and the sackcloth for the mourning associated with leprosy and uncleanness.⁹

In this way, the astral symbols are given peculiar coloring depending on the context. The Babylonians worshipped the stars, and so they are extinguished. The Egyptians worshipped the sun, so God darkens it. The Jews continued to maintain the sacrifices, so the moon is turned to blood.

To round out this discussion, we need only look at two more passages, briefly. After promising the coming of the Spirit and

the judgment upon apostate Israel in Joel 2, God goes on to say in Chapter 3 that He will shake down all the nations of the world, and bring them to their knees. Speaking of the nations, He says that "the sun and moon grow dark, and the stars lose their brightness" (Joel 3:15).

Speaking of the same event, our Lord said that "immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Matthew 24:29; cf. Mark 13:24-25; Luke 21:25). This is not a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem, because it comes *immediately after* that event. It is rather a reference to the shaking of the nations (Haggai 2:6-7; Hebrews 12:26). We notice that the language of blood is absent. It is simple extinction of these lights that is prophesied.

Failure to take careful note of context has misled some expositors into thinking that Matthew 24:29 is speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem; but as we have seen, it cannot be. This is particularly clear in the parallel account in Luke 21, where we read that the Jews

will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the inhabited earth; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken (Luke 21:24-26).¹⁰

In conclusion, the symbolism of universal collapse—the extinction of sun, moon, and stars—has reference to the fall of nations and empires. In the Old Testament, it was used for Babylon, for Egypt, for Israel, and for the nations in general. In the New Testament, it was used for Israel and also for the nations in general. At the destruction of Jerusalem, the Jewish sun went into black eclipse, mourning in sackcloth, and the Jewish moon went into red eclipse, the blood-red of sacrifice. Immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem, God began shaking down the nations, darkening their suns and moons, and replac-

ing them with the light of the Sun of Righteousness, whose rising brings healing in His wings (Malachi 4:2).

Conclusion

God's skies are friendly skies. He made the sun, moon, and stars. If some people have perverted these into false religions, such as astrology, this need not cause Christians any alarm. When we view the skies through new eyes, we are free to learn the constellations as Biblical symbols and become at home in the night sky.

I wish to stress one point that has emerged from our survey of astral symbolism. We have seen that the expression "stars of the heavens" and "powers of the heavens" often refer to human governors. This means that the expression "heaven and earth" can *sometimes* refer to the body politic. The expression "new heavens and new earth," while it can refer to a transfigured cosmos, can also refer to a new order on the earth: new rulers and new people. We shall come back to this in the latter part of this book, when we examine the succession of worlds in the Bible.

Glorious things of thee are spoken,
Zion, city of our God;
He, whose word cannot be broken,
Formed thee for His own abode.
On the Rock of Ages founded,
What can shake thy sure repose?
With salvation's walls surrounded,
Thou may'st smile at all thy foes.

—John Newton

S I X

ROCKS, GOLD, AND GEMS

I have seldom lived in large cities, and thus have not often been privileged to visit museums. I recall my frustration on one occasion, however, when I visited an exhibit of precious gemstones. I did not get to see very much of it, because the room was so crowded with people peering through the glass at these pieces of rock. In another room there was an exhibit of rocks that glowed with peculiar colors under ultraviolet light. One had to stand in front of a window to see these, and again it was difficult to work one's way through the crowd.

I don't suppose my experience is particularly unique or worth recounting, except that it is a telling example of the fact that people, for some reason, like to look at certain pieces of rock.

The Bible has a lot to say about stones and rocks, and more than we might think about gold, gems, and precious stones. These are given us as emblems of God and His glory; and since men are made in God's image, they also speak of men.

The Rock of Ages

The best way to begin a study of this is to look at God, the Rock of our salvation. The key passage to begin with is Deuteronomy 32, which might be called the Song of the Rock, though it is usually called the Song of Moses because Moses wrote it. You remember that when Israel came out of Egypt, the Israelites were thirsty, and God told Moses to strike the rock to give them water. God's cloud sat upon the rock; and when Moses brought the rod of judgment down on the rock, it passed through the cloud. In this way, God told the people that He would take upon Himself the judgment that they deserved, and that when He did

so, living water would be given to them. Thus, God told them that He was their Rock, and that He would give them water (Exodus 17:2-6). Naturally, when God the Rock made covenant with Israel, He wrote it on stone (Exodus 24:12).

For years after that, Israel wandered in the wilderness. This wilderness was full of rocks and huge stones. They were all around Israel as she traveled, and they surrounded the people as they gathered to Moses to hear the song of Deuteronomy 32.

I proclaim the name of the Lord,
Ascribe greatness to our God!
The Rock! His work is perfect,
For all His ways are just;
A God of faithfulness and without injustice,
Righteous and upright is He
(Deuteronomy 32:3-4).

In other words, God is constant and unfailing to His people. Like a rock, God does not change from day to day, from time to time.

But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked—
You are grown fat, thick, and sleek—
Then he forsook God who made him,
And scorned the Rock of his salvation.
They made Him jealous with strange gods,
With abominations they provoked Him to anger. . . .
You neglected the Rock who begot you,
And forgot the God who gave you birth
(Deuteronomy 32:15-16, 18).

Moses told them that God would forsake them if they turned to other “rocks”:

How could one chase a thousand,
And two put ten thousand to flight,
Unless their Rock had sold them,
And the Lord had given them up?
Indeed their rock is not like our Rock.
Even our enemies themselves judge this
(Deuteronomy 32:30-31).

The gods of other nations are like little rocks without much to them. Israel would be foolish to forsake the True Rock, because in time God would destroy these pebbles.

And He will say, "Where are their gods,
The rock in which they sought refuge?"
(Deuteronomy 32:37)

When Samuel was born, his mother Hannah celebrated God as her Rock: "There is no one holy like the Lord, Indeed, there is no one besides Thee, nor is there any rock like our God" (1 Samuel 2:2).

David also celebrated God as his Rock:

The Lord is my Rock and my Fortress and my Deliverer; my God, my Rock, in whom I take refuge. . . . For who is God besides the Lord? And who is a Rock, besides our God? . . . The Lord lives, and blessed be my Rock; and exalted be God, the Rock of my salvation (2 Samuel 22:2-3, 32, 47; cf. 2 Samuel 23:1-5).

The Psalter abounds in references to God as our Rock:

To Thee, O Lord, I call;
My Rock, do not be deaf to me (Psalm 28:1).

Incline Thine ear to me, rescue me quickly;
Be Thou to me a Rock of strength,
A stronghold to save me.
For Thou art my Rock and my Fortress (Psalm 31:2-3).

I will say to God my Rock, "Why hast Thou forgotten me?
Why do I go mourning?" (Psalm 42:9)

O come, let us sing for joy to the Lord;
Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation
(Psalm 95:1; cf. also 61:2; 62:7; 71:3; 89:26; 92:15; 94:22).

Isaiah also delights to call God the Rock of Israel:

For you have forgotten the God of your salvation
And have not remembered the Rock of your refuge
(Isaiah 17:10).

Trust in the Lord forever, for in God the Lord, we have an everlasting Rock. (Isaiah 26:4; cf. 30:29; 44:8)

We can summarize what the Bible says about God as our Rock by taking note of five things. First, the rock points to *strength*. A rock is hard and firm, and if it is a large rock, it is pretty much unbreakable.

Second, God presents Himself as a rock to hide in, a *fortress*. God put Moses in the cleft of a rock to protect him from God's consuming glory (Exodus 33:22); and since this rock is said to be a place "next to Me," commentators have often associated it with Jesus Christ, our Protector.

Third, God as Rock points to *judgment*. If a large rock falls on you, you are crushed, and just such a judging rock is God. Jesus called Himself "the Stone which the builders rejected," and said that "every one who falls on that Stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust" (Luke 20:17-18). Falling on the Stone and being broken is an image of salvation, but the Stone falling on you is an image of judgment. Along these lines, we remember that the prescribed method of execution in the Bible was by stoning (Deuteronomy 13:10, etc.). Daniel's vision of world history saw the Kingdom of Christ as a "stone cut without hands" that would strike and shatter the kingdoms of the world (Daniel 2). In an ambiguous passage, the saints are said to rejoice when they dash the children of Babylon against the rock (Psalm 137:9)—but in the light of Luke 20:18, does this point to destruction or salvation? Since the Church has always seen the waters of baptism as waters of judgment unto salvation, baptismal fonts have often been made of stone.

Fourth, God as our Rock is the *foundation* of His house, His Kingdom. The wise man builds his house on this Rock (Matthew 7:24-25). Christ is chief Cornerstone, and we are all living stones (Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:6).

Fifth, a mighty rock gives *shade*, a picture of God's provision and protection. We have seen that God's glory-cloud gave shade to Israel in the wilderness (Isaiah 4:6; 25:4). A large shade-giving rock is like this cloud, in shape and function.

God's people, as His images, are also like rocks. God is the Great Rock, and we are little rocks. We have already mentioned

how we as living stones are built on God as our foundation, His living temple. Isaiah 32:2 speaks of how Christians minister to one another as rocks, "Each will be like a refuge from the wind, and a shelter from the storm, like streams of water in a dry country, like the shade of a huge rock in a parched land."

The best known passage that speaks of this is Matthew 16:18, "And I say to you that you are Peter, and upon this Rock I will build My church." The name Peter means rock, but it is not the same as the word for the Rock upon which Christ builds His church. That second word means "great rock" or "bedrock, foundation." Thus, Peter is a little rock, a "chip off the True Rock," as it were.¹

The Stones of Havilah

The first stones mentioned in the Bible are those of Havilah, a land downstream from Eden.

Now a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it divided and became four rivers. The name of the first is Pishon; it flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good; the bdellium and the onyx stone are there (Genesis 2:10-12).

Eden is the land of food, and the outlying lands are lands of other raw materials. The Bible conceives of commerce between these lands, so that those of Adam's descendants who lived in Eden would have to engage in trade with those who had moved downstream to Havilah. In this way, precious stones would be brought from Havilah back to Eden to adorn the sanctuary.

When Israel came out of Egypt, she sojourned in the land of Havilah while the Tabernacle and the High Priest's garments were made (Genesis 25:18). Here in this land of rocks were made many items of gold and onyx. Indeed, the only reference in the Bible to the onyx stone, outside of Genesis 2, is in connection with the High Priest's garments. The shoulder stones of the "ephod" were made of onyx, and had the names of the twelve tribes put upon them (Exodus 25:7; 28:9-12).

No one knows what bdellium is supposed to be. The only other reference to it in the Bible is Numbers 11:7, where we are

told that manna was the color of bdellium. Since manna was white (Exodus 16:31), the bdellium was also white. Notice that Israel only ate manna while she was in the wilderness of Havilah, the land of bdellium.²

Gold is much more familiar to us. More than any other metals, gold and silver show forth the glory of God. In every time, in every clime, in every land and nation, gold and silver come to be regarded as valuable. There are two points to be made concerning this.

First of all, gold and silver, especially gold, are heavy. The Hebrew word for "glory" literally means "heavy." A few years ago, in American slang anything that was impressive was "heavy," and this reflects a sound linguistic instinct. Part of the attractiveness and glory of gold, then, lies in its weight.

Second, not only is gold heavy, it is also radiant and shining. God's glory appears as a flaming fire and a burning furnace, and gold more than any other mineral ties into the human tendency to appreciate this glory. The walls of the Tabernacle and Temple were both lined with gold, creating a golden glory environment all around. Similarly, the fiery tree or lampstand in the Tabernacle—an abiding replica of the burning bush—was made of gold, as were many other items.

Stones of Fire

Let us turn our attention now to precious stones. They are, after all, the glory-stones. We enjoy looking at them in coffee table books. We make jewelry out of them. We pay high prices for them, not because they are rare (after all many other minerals are much rarer), but because they are beautiful and thus highly prized.

In Ezekiel 28:13-14, we find a description of the "King of Tyre":

You were in Eden, the garden of God;
Every precious stone was your covering:
The ruby, the topaz, and the diamond;
The beryl, the onyx, and the jasper;
The lapis lazuli, the turquoise, and the emerald;
And the gold, the workmanship of your settings
and sockets,

Was in you.
On the day that you were created they were prepared.
You were the anointed cherub who covers;
And I placed you.
You were on the holy mountain of God;
You walked in the midst of the stones of fire.

Some commentators have suggested that the "King of Tyre" is Lucifer (because he is called a cherub), and others have pointed to Adam (because of Eden). In light of the context, however, we should see this "King of Tyre" as the High Priest of Israel. Israel was the true head of the nations, spiritually speaking (Genesis 12:3; Deuteronomy 28:13). Tyre had been allied spiritually with Israel in David's time, and thus had recognized the High Priest as her ultimate earthly spiritual leader; indeed, Tyre had helped build the Temple (2 Samuel 5:11-12; 1 Kings 5:1-18; 9:10-14; 2 Chronicles 8:2; Psalm 45:12). Tyre, living downstream from "Eden" in "Havilah," assisted Solomon in getting gold for the Temple (1 Kings 9:26-28). Tyre had provided these "Havilah" raw materials in exchange for table provisions from the Edenic "Foodland" of Israel, thus providing a snapshot of how the priestly nation was to interact with other converted nations (1 Kings 5:9-12).

Now, however, Tyre had broken faith, and thus the Lord made a long prophecy against her and her prince (Ezekiel 26-28). This apostasy did not occur in a vacuum, however. As Ezekiel had already shown at length (Ezekiel 1-23), it was Israel's apostasy that had misled the nations. It was the High Priest, the spiritual King of Tyre, whose sin had ultimately caused the Prince of Tyre to go astray.

Now with this background we can understand better the imagery of Ezekiel 28:13-14. Eden, the garden of God, is the land of Israel, and most particularly Jerusalem (Ezekiel 31:8-9, 16; 36:35). The covering of precious stones is the breastpiece of the High Priest, described in Exodus 28:15-21. The High Priest was the cherubic guardian of the Temple, and his failure to maintain God's holiness had led both Israel and her ally Tyre into sin. The holy mountain is Mount Moriah, the Temple site. We notice that the gemstones are called "stones of fire" (vv. 14, 16). This is because these stones house fire. If you have a diamond ring,

hold it up. Notice the fire within? Each of these stones is a tiny image of God's glory, His fire. The High Priest, whose chest was covered with such fiery stones, thus had his own personal glory-cloud, an image of God's.

It is because gemstones so pointedly reflect God's glory that we regard them as beautiful. It is written on the heart of man to appreciate glory, and it takes a great act of the will to pervert this attraction. We delight in a beautiful sunset, in the sound of rushing water, and in gemstones, because each of these images the very glory of God Himself. Fallen man may not want God, but he does want God's glory.

Not only can we see gemstones as frozen pieces of glory, but we can also see them as frozen pieces of the rainbow. The rainbow is, of course, a manifestation of glory, being made of light and all colors. It appears in the heavens, like the glory of God, and the Bible shows it encircling God's throne.

The rainbow first appears in the familiar passage Genesis 9:12-16, where God put His warbow in the sky, and said, "When the bow is in the cloud, then I will look upon it, to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth" (Genesis 9:16). It is nice for us to look at rainbows and be reminded that God will never again destroy the earth with a Flood, but it is far more important for God to be "reminded" when He sees it. Of course, God does not need to be reminded of anything, but He has chosen to do things this way for our comfort.

But does God only see this rainbow when it rains? No, because God is always surrounded by His glory-cloud, and thus He always sees the rainbow. When Ezekiel saw God's glory-chariot, he wrote that "as the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of God" (Ezekiel 1:28). Similarly, when John stood before God's throne, he saw that "there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance" (Revelation 4:3). John compared the rainbow to a gemstone. Finally, in Revelation 10:1, John had a vision of the exalted Christ, and described him as "another strong Angel coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon His head, and His face was like the

sun, and His legs like pillars of fire.” The rainbow around His head means that Christ looks through it to see the world, always reminded of the Noahic covenant.

The rainbow encircles God’s throne, but so, too, do the gemstones. In Revelation 21 we have a vision of the New Jerusalem, the city built around God’s throne (Revelation 22:1). Jerusalem is an architectural replica of God’s glory-home:

The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst.³ And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl.

In other words, the city was encircled with gemstones: stones of the land for Israel, and pearls from the sea for Gentiles.⁴ These foundation stones have already been associated with the names of the Apostles (Revelation 21:14), just as the High Priest’s twelve stones had written on them the twelve tribes of Israel. Thus, these stones represent people. (See also Isaiah 54:11-12.)

We are God’s house of gemstones. The righteous people in the Church are likened to gemstones by Paul in a famous temple passage:

According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise masterbuilder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is revealed with fire (1 Corinthians 3:10-13a).

Paul is writing to pastors, who will continue building the house whose foundation he has already laid. Paul says that the Church is built up of saints, who are like gold, silver, and gemstones, but also includes Satan’s agents, who are like wood, hay, and stubble. God puts the wicked into the Church so that they may

catch on fire, and turn the Church into a refining furnace to purify His people.

Conclusion

God does not want ugly brown stones adorning the walls of His house. He wants lovely, pure stones, glorious stones of fire, chips of frozen rainbow. He wants a people of peace, a rainbow people, who respect the Noahic covenant and thus love His world and will not destroy it. Christians are the rainbow warbow of the Prince of Peace, bringing peace to the world of humanity in the Gospel.

But also, the fact that the High Priest carried the gemstones on his heart means that we as God's gemstones are always next to the heart of Christ. We may feel like ugly gray rocks that have been cast aside; but we know in faith that God carries us on His heart, and we are of infinite value to Him.

Fulfilled is all that David told
In true prophetic song of old;
How God the nations' King should be,
For God is reigning from the tree.

O tree of beauty, tree most fair,
Ordained those holy limbs to bear;
Gone is thy shame, each crimsoned bough
Proclaims the King of glory now.

Blest tree, whose chosen branches bore
The wealth that did the world restore,
The price of humankind to pay,
And spoil the spoiler of his prey.

O cross, our one reliance, hail!
Still may thy power with us avail
More good for righteous souls to win,
And save the sinner from his sin.

— Venantius Fortunatus (1-3)
and Anonymous (4)

Translation: *The Episcopal Hymnal*, 1940

S E V E N

TREES AND THORNS

Trees arrest our attention in the earliest chapters of the Bible; we are told not only that the Garden of Eden was planted with all kinds of trees, but that there were two special trees in its center, the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Adam's interaction with these two trees almost doomed humanity, had not the Shoot of Jesse come to die on the Tree of the Cross. As a result, God's people can be replanted, and flourish "like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither" (Psalm 1:3).

The trees of Eden are said to be good for food, but also delightful to look at (Genesis 2:9). In other words, in terms of their appearance they were glorious. Lovely trees are, then, but one more emblem of the glory of God in the world.

Because of man's sin, however, the ground would yield ugly thorns as well as splendid trees (Genesis 3:18). Though this is not explicitly said, the symbolic structure of Genesis 3 and 4 makes it plain that man, himself made of earth, would yield sons who are like trees and thorns; and thus we have a tree, Abel, and a thorn, Cain. The Bible continues to picture the unrighteous as thorns, as in Judges 9:14-15. Such bramble-men imposed their curse on our Lord when they gave Him a crown of thorns (Matthew 27:29).

Trees as Provision

As we noticed, Genesis 2 speaks of trees as providing both food and beauty. In terms of food, we can look back at Genesis 1:29, where God had said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; it shall be food for you." These two categories of food plants were established on the third

day of creation, when God said, "Let the earth sprout grass, herbs yielding seed, fruit trees bearing fruit after their kind" (Genesis 1:11). Although there are other things we eat as well, such as leaves and tubers, the Bible takes special notice of grain (seed) and fruit. Grain and fruit are processed into bread and wine. Melchizedek gave bread and wine to Abram (Genesis 14:18). Joseph encountered a baker and a cupbearer in prison, and eventually he replaced them both (Genesis 40; 41:53-57; 44:2-5).¹ This, of course, carries over into the bread and wine of Holy Communion.

After the fall of man, plants provided not only food but also medicine. The Bible signifies this by saying that fruit is for food, and leaves for healing:

And by the river on its bank, on one side and on the other, will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear every month because their water flows from the sanctuary, and their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing (Ezekiel 47:12; cf. Revelation 22:2; Psalm 1:3).

In terms of Biblical symbolism these trees are the saints, fed by the spiritual waters of the sanctuary, and healing the nations of the world by the Gospel.

Genesis 2 says that trees provide beauty; and after the fall, part of that beauty is shade from the burning sun. The Bible refers to this in several striking symbolic passages. In Ezekiel 17:23, Israel is pictured as a great tree whose shady ministry attracts the birds of the nations:

On the high mountain of Israel I shall plant it, that it may bring forth boughs and bear fruit, and become a stately cedar. And birds of every wing will dwell under it; they will dwell in the shade of its branches.

The cedar here is Israel, because the Temple on Mount Moriah was made of cedar wood (1 Kings 6). The birds are the nations. Jesus repeated this parable in Matthew 13:31-32, but spoke of a mustard tree, showing that the kingdom was going to shift from the Old Covenant cedar to a new planting (cf. Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19).

In Jonah 4, Assyria is pictured as a suddenly sprouting plant that would provide shade for Israel. Jonah had been reluctant to preach to Nineveh, fearing that God would convert those people and thereby raise them up as a powerful nation. He knew that Israel deserved judgment, and that God had threatened to take the Gospel to another nation, thereby raising it up as a weapon to punish Israel (Deuteronomy 32:21). Sure enough, the people of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah, and Jonah was horrified. In spite of her sins, Jonah loved wayward Israel and hated to see the Gospel taken from her to the Gentiles (compare Paul, Romans 9-11). Jonah went outside the city to wait and see what God would do.

So the Lord God appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant. But God appointed a worm when dawn came the next day, and it attacked the plant and it withered. And it came about when the sun came up that God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah's head, so that he became faint and begged with all his soul to die, saying "Death is better to me than life" (Jonah 4:6-8).

The plant represented Assyria. Its sudden sprouting represented the conversion of Assyria. Such a converted nation would be sure to bless Israel, in terms of the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12:3), and thus would provide shade for Jonah (Israel). In time, however, the serpent would attack the roots of Assyria, and that nation would apostatize, and would indeed become a threat to Israel, as Jonah had feared. Israel would experience the scorching heat of God's wrath.²

God did promise to restore Israel, however. The promise was made through Hosea, and again employed *arboreal*, or tree-like, imagery:

I will be like the dew to Israel; he will blossom like the lily and he will strike his roots like the cedars of Lebanon. His shoots will sprout, and his beauty will be like the olive tree, and his fragrance like the cedars of Lebanon. Those who live in his shadow will again raise grain, and they will blossom like the vine. His renown will be like the wine of Lebanon. O Ephraim,

what more have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like a luxuriant cypress; from Me comes your fruit (Hosea 14:5-8).

It is interesting to note the Temple imagery that comes through here, because the olive, cypress, and cedar were the three woods used in the Temple, while the bronze pillars and bronze sea were decorated as lilies (1 Kings 6; 7:19, 26). Note also again the association of grain (bread) and the vine (wine).

We should also note that God compares Himself to a tree here. The Bible does not refer to God as a Tree as often as it does to God as a Rock, but this is one instance of it. The shade of the tree canopy recalls the shade of God's glory-cloud (Isaiah 4:5-6) and the shade of the mighty rock. As we shall see, the tree in the Bible is a common picture of a ladder to heaven, with the glory-canopy at the top.

In summary, the primary aspects of the tree to which the Bible calls attention are food and medicine, beauty and shade. The picture of the blessed and happy Israelite is found in 1 Kings 4:25, "So Judah and Israel lived in safety, every man under his vine and his fig tree."

God Manifest at Trees

At first glance there do not seem to be many "arboreal theophanies"—appearances of God in or at trees—in the Bible, but there are more than we might think. The key that unlocks this imagery is found in Exodus 3:1-5:

Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of the bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. So Moses said, "Let me turn aside now, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burned up." When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush, and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then He said, "Stop coming near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

There are several important things to notice here. *First*, this takes place on God's mountain. We have already taken note of the prophecies of Ezekiel and Hosea concerning God's planting a tree on His mountain, and we have associated this with the wood of the Temple. There are typological parallels between those later statements and this event.

Second, the burning fire in the bush is to be correlated with the burning fire of God's glory-cloud as it later appeared on this same mountain at the time of the giving of the law (Exodus 19:16-18; and cf. Genesis 15:17). It is God's glory that is in the midst of the bush (Deuteronomy 33:16).

Third, the environment around the bush is said to be holy ground. This is only true of God's sanctuary. Later, Mount Sinai will be holy ground, and then the Tabernacle and Temple precincts. These things stand in a typological line: The burning wooden bush of glory on Mount Horeb becomes the burning glory atop Mount Sinai (same mountain), then the glory-cloud inside the wooden Tabernacle, and then the glory-cloud inside the wooden Temple on Mount Moriah (Zion).

Thus, God reveals Himself in connection with trees and wood frequently in the Bible, because the Tabernacle and the Temple, made of wood, are themselves arborescent theophanies. As we have already mentioned, and as will become clearer as we proceed, the Tabernacle and Temple are actually symbols of God's host gathered around Him. Trees stand for people, and thus the wood of the Tabernacle and Temple stand for people. The gold overlay on this wood means that God's host is glorified.

God's cloud is made up of His heavenly host around Him. God's people are like stones of fire arrayed as a rainbow around Him. Now we see that God's people are also like a planting of trees around Him. With this in mind, we can understand one more dimension to the burning bush. The bush represents Israel in the furnace of Egyptian affliction, an affliction actually caused by God's refining fire. The fire of God's glory would purify them in the furnace of Egypt (cf. Exodus 3:7).

Once we see that wood cut from trees can represent God's presence among His people, we can see Moses' and Aaron's rods as arboraceous manifestations of God's glory and power, particularly of the arm of God (plagues: Exodus 4:2-5; 7:10-12, 15, 17,

20; 8:5, 16; 9:3, 8, 15, 22-23; 10:12-13; Red Sea: Exodus 14:16, 21, 26; water from the rock: Exodus 17:5-6; Numbers 20:8-9; defeat of Amalek: Exodus 17:11; Aaron's rod blossoms: Numbers 17). The hyssop branch, so often used in bringing cleansing, resurrecting water to those symbolically dead in uncleanness, should also be associated with God's power (Exodus 12:22; Leviticus 14:4, 6, 49-52; Numbers 19:6, 18; Psalm 51:7; Hebrews 9:19).

We can mention also the use of oil from trees, especially olive oil, in connection with God's glory manifestation. All the furniture of the Tabernacle was anointed with special olive oil (Exodus 30:22-33), and olive oil was burned to provide the glory-light in the Tabernacle lampstand (Leviticus 24:1-4; Zechariah 4:3, 11-12). The holiest parts of the Temple were made of olive wood (1 Kings 6:23, 31-34), and the New Covenant involves a rejection of Mount Zion and a shift to the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4; Matthew 24:3; 26:30; Acts 1:12).³

But most interesting is the institutionalized burning bush: the golden lampstand in the Tabernacle and Temple.⁴ The lampstand was a stylized almond tree that burned with fire (Exodus 25:31-40; 37:17-24). We can hardly avoid the connection with the burning bush. The word for the shaft of the lampstand is literally "reed." Such reeds represent people, as in 2 Kings 18:21, Isaiah 36:6, and Ezekiel 29:6-7, all of which refer to Pharaoh, since Egypt was a land of reeds. A reference to the lampstand as an image of people is found in a famous verse, Isaiah 42:3, "A bruised reed He will not break, and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish."

The idea of a "dimly burning wick," of the lampstand about to go out, occurs elsewhere in the Bible. Just before the Tabernacle was destroyed, we find that "the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord where the ark of God was" (1 Samuel 3:3). Shortly after this event, the "lamp" of God's revelation dwindled further as the Ark was captured and the High Priest died.

David and his heirs, God's oil-anointed kings, are spoken of as lamps that need to be sustained (2 Samuel 21:17; 1 Kings 11:36; 15:4). Given the connection between lamps and trees, we also find David's line spoken of as a tree, the root and Shoot of Jesse (Isaiah 4:2; 6:13; 11:10, 12; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Zechariah

4:3, 6-10, 14; Ezekiel 17:22-23; Romans 15:12). The Messiah is the True Lampstand. He is the very Word of God, the Tree of Life, the Lamp to our feet (2 Samuel 22:29; Psalm 119:105).

Trees as Ladders to Heaven

Having seen God manifest in connection with trees, and the Messiah as a Tree of Life, let us look now at trees as ladders to heaven. We can easily visualize a tree as a ladder to heaven, with the bottom as the beginning of the ladder, the trunk as the ladder proper, and the leafy crown on top as the glory-cloud of heaven. Is this a *Biblical* image, however, or is it just one that we have dreamed up?

Clearly it is Biblical. The place to begin is with the most famous counterfeit tree-ladder, found in Daniel 4. There Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of himself as a Tree of Life.

The tree grew large and became strong, and its height reached to the sky, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. Its foliage was beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beast of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the sky dwelt in its branches, and all living creatures fed themselves from it (Daniel 4:11-12).

God ordered that this presumptuous Tower of Babel Tree be cut down, with only a stump remaining (Daniel 4:14-15). This meant that Nebuchadnezzar would be bestially insane for seven years, to teach him not to play god (Daniel 4:16, 20-33).

Just as the Tower of Babel was a counterfeit ladder to heaven, so Jacob's visionary ladder was the true one (Genesis 28:12-17). Babylon means "gate of heaven," and at the foot of Jacob's ladder was the true gate of heaven (v. 17). Just so, if Nebuchadnezzar's ladder tree was a counterfeit, there must also be a true ladder tree. That true Ladder is the Messiah. Jesus said to Nathaniel, "You shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man," referring to Jacob's vision (John 1:51). But also, in context, Jesus stresses that Nathaniel has been sitting under a fig tree (John 1:48, 50). The fig tree, a symbol of Israel as God's priestly nation, is correlated with the ladder of heaven, with the True Israel, Jesus Christ.

I need to mention something briefly here that we shall take up in more detail later. Altars and pillar stones are also ladders to heaven. This is because they are miniature holy mountains, and the holy mountain is a ladder to heaven. The Tower of Babel, a ziggurat, and the pyramids of Egypt were counterfeit holy mountains. The holy mountain has God's glory at the top, the glory-heaven. The altar and pillar represent this (see Diagram 7.1). We shall come back to this in detail later. I mention it now to point up the association of altars and trees in the patriarchal era. Abram built a worship altar, a ladder to heaven, at Shechem, and this is associated with a tree (Genesis 12:6; 35:4; Joshua 24:25; Judges 9:6). The same is true of Abram at Mamre (Genesis 13:18; 14:13; 18:1), at Beersheba (Genesis 21:33), and of Jacob at Bethel (Genesis 28:18, 22; 35:7, 8, 14). These were terebinth oaks, trees that had massive trunks and huge cloud-like canopies. (Also note that God fed Elijah under a broom tree, and from there led him to the holy mountain Horeb, 1 Kings 19:4, 5, 7.)

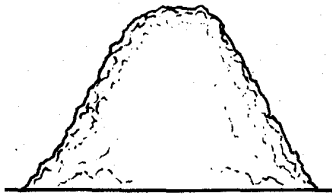
The gate, or entry court, of the city was the place where the law courts were held (Deuteronomy 17:5; 22:15, 24; Ruth 4:1, etc.). The gate or forecourt of the Tabernacle was where God executed judgment upon the animal substitutes in the sacrificial system (Leviticus 1:3, etc.); and as we shall see later on, this area was the foot of the symbolic holy mountain, and thus the bottom of the ladder, the gate of heaven. The association of the gate, then, is with judgment.

We find the same association with trees. As a ladder to heaven, the base of the tree is the gate. Thus, Deborah set up her chair of judgment at the Palm Tree of Deborah (Judges 4:4-5). Joash the Abiezrite held court and conducted false worship at an oak (Judges 6:11, 12, 19, 21, 30-32). Saul held court at a pomegranate tree (1 Samuel 14:2) and at a tamarisk tree (1 Samuel 22:6).

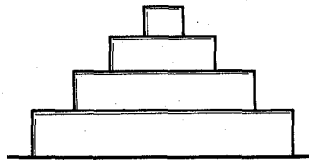
Of course, there were plenty of counterfeit ladder trees, and the Bible condemns false worship when conducted under leafy trees (Deuteronomy 12:2; Isaiah 57:5-7; Jeremiah 2:20; 3:6; 17:2). But these are only counterfeits of the truth.

In this connection it remains only to note that since both altars and trees are ladders to heaven, a tree can be an altar. The

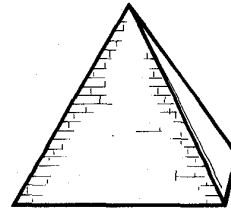
Diagram 7.1
Ladders to Heaven



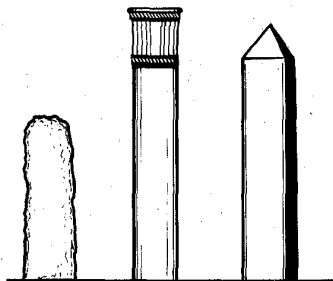
Holy Mountain



Ziggurat



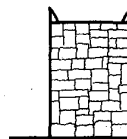
Pyramid



Stone

Pillar

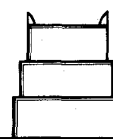
Obelisk



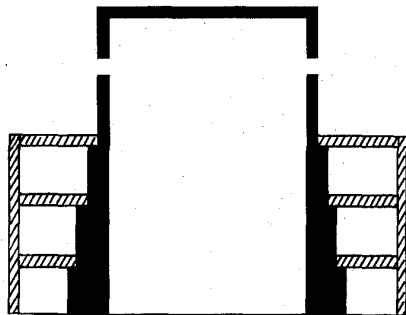
Patriarchal
Stone
Altar



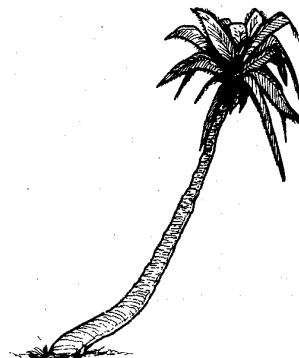
The Altar
of Incense



Ezekiel's
Altar



Solomon's Temple
Cross section, front view



Palm Tree



Terebinth Tree

illustration of this is the cross of Christ, whose four extremities correlate to the four horns of the altar. As blood was put on the four horns of the altar (the four corners of the earth), so the blood of Christ was on the four ends of the cross (head, hands, feet). The cross is our altar, and our ladder to heaven.⁵

God's Grove

We have noted that God's people are spoken of as trees. Genesis 2 sets up the connection by saying that both men and trees come out of the ground (Genesis 2:7, 9). We have mentioned already such passages as Psalm 1 and Judges 9, where trees symbolize men. An interesting sidelight on this symbolism is provided in Mark 8:24, where the blind man healed by our Lord initially saw men as trees walking.

Trees represent men, and trees are found in association with men. Such associations often convey imagery to us, and so let us briefly trace this imagery as it appears in Scripture. To begin with, of course, is the Garden of Eden, a planting of trees and also the first planting of humanity. Cast from Eden, man could only expect the scorching sun; it is a sign of God's blessing whenever we find the righteous dwelling at groves of trees.

In the Patriarchal era, the tree that stands out is the terebinth or oak.⁶ Abraham in particular is pictured dwelling among oaks (Genesis 12:6; 13:18; 14:13; 18:1, all mistranslated "plain" in the A.V.; and cf. Genesis 35:4, 8). When Israel entered the land, she was reminded that she was but following in the footsteps of Abram, who had lived at the oaks of Moreh (Deuteronomy 11:30).

In the Mosaic era, while other trees are mentioned from time to time, the tree that seems to stand out is the palm. God's placing of Israel in the land of Canaan is repeatedly spoken of in Edenic terms as His "planting," His grove of trees (Exodus 15:17; Numbers 24:6; 2 Samuel 7:10; Psalm 44:2; 80:8-12; Isaiah 5:2, 7; 60:21; 61:3; Jeremiah 2:21; 12:10; 24:6; Amos 9:15). This grove of human trees around God's arboraceous footstool—for the Ark was made of wood overlaid with gold—was celebrated annually at the Feast of Tabernacles, when Israel was commanded:

Now on the first day you shall take for yourselves the foliage of beautiful trees, palm branches, and boughs of leafy trees and

willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. . . . You shall dwell in booths [tabernacles] for seven days; all the native-born in Israel shall dwell in booths [tabernacles] (Leviticus 23:40, 42).

Of course, the Tabernacle itself was built of boards (acacia wood this time) and pillars covered with gold, a symbol of God's glorified human host (Exodus 26:15-25, 32, 37; Galatians 2:9; Revelation 3:12). The Divine Forester not only plants His trees, but also planes them, fitting each into His house. It was no accident that our Lord was a carpenter. He is both planter and harvester-builder, both Alpha and Omega, both the Creator of history and the Governor of destiny.

When Israel came out of Egypt, she encamped at Elim, "where there were twelve springs of water and seventy date palms" (Exodus 15:27; Numbers 33:9). In my opinion, the twelve springs here stand for the twelve tribes, and the seventy palms for the seventy nations of the world (Genesis 10), who are to be fed by Israel. It was Israel's mission to give grace to the world, a mission she generally failed to carry out.

Such spiritual water would grow new palms to replace the old. The first city destroyed by Israel in Canaan was Jericho, known as the City of Palm Trees (2 Chronicles 28:15; Judges 1:16; 3:13). Once the counterfeit City of Palm Trees was destroyed, God began to grow His own. Fittingly, Deborah judged Israel under a palm tree (Judges 4:5). When finally grown, the true City of Palm Trees was the Temple, which was frescoed with palms all around inside, representing God's arboreal host (1 Kings 6:29; Ezekiel 41:18-20; Psalm 92:12-14; cf. Psalm 52:8).

If the palm predominated during the Mosaic era, the cedar comes to the fore during the Davidic. The palm trees carved in the Temple were carved out of cedar wood. Cedar predominated in the Temple, as the second most holy wood (1 Kings 5-7). The most holy wood was the olive, used for the most holy places, and the least holy was the cypress, used for the outer areas.⁷ We have already taken note of Ezekiel 17, which prophecies concerning the Davidic house in cedar terms. The Davidic covenant itself can be associated with the cedar, while the Temple and Palace complex is associated with cedar, olive, and cypress.

With the destruction of the Temple, the Kingdom moved into a period of outward humility, but inward glory (see Chapter 16). The myrtle tree receives notice during the post-exilic period. God had prophesied renewal in terms of the myrtle (Isaiah 55:13), and Nehemiah added it to the list of trees used for the Feast of Tabernacles (Nehemiah 8:15). Zechariah saw Israel as a myrtle grove (Zechariah 1:8-11), and it is doubtless no accident that Queen Esther's original Hebrew name was Myrtle (Hadassah; Esther 2:7).

In the New Covenant we have another shift. Jesus repeated the parable of the cedar tree from Ezekiel 17, but transferred it to the mustard, a tree without any Old Testament associations (Matthew 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19). This must have offended His first audience, for they would have taken it as a deliberate assault on their hopes for a revived Davidic monarchy. Jesus was announcing that His Kingdom would be of a different sort, as different as the humble mustard from the mighty cedar. We have mentioned already Jesus' shift from cedar to olive, the most holy wood. Thus, mustard and olive seem to be preeminently associated with the New Covenant.

Of course, none of these images is exclusive. Throughout we find references to vine and fig tree, as well as to many others. (See Diagram 7.2.)

Diagram 7.2
Kingdom Wood

<i>Period</i>	<i>Arboreal Imagery</i>
Eden	Trees of Life and of the Knowledge of Good and Evil
Noah	"Gopher" wood for the Ark
Abraham	Terebinth or Oak trees
Wilderness	Acacia for the Tabernacle
Settlement	Palms
David	Cedar
Temple	Olive, Cedar, Cypress
Kingdom	Fig
Restoration	Myrtle
New Covenant	Mustard, Olive

Conclusion

Certainly the Bible enables us to view trees through new eyes! But this is not really new for Christians. Each year, most Christians set up a tree in their homes. The Christmas tree has its origins in the medieval paradise tree, decorated with apples, and the North European Christmas light, a treelike stand decorated with boughs and candles.⁸ The stylized fruits (balls and ornaments) of our Christmas tree, and its electric lights, still speak of glory and beauty, and point us to the nativity of Christ, the Tree of Life.

All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful,
The Lord God made them all.

Each little flower that opens,
Each little bird that sings,
He made their glowing colors,
He made their tiny wings.

He gave us eyes to see them,
And lips that we might tell,
How great is God Almighty,
Who has made all things well.

—Cecil Frances Alexander

E I G H T

BIRDS AND BEASTS

When God created the world, he set up the animals as man's particular zone of dominion. God said,

Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth (Genesis 1:26).

Again God said to humanity,

Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth (Genesis 1:28).

We notice what God did not say. He did not say, "Rule over the soil, the moon and planets, the grass, trees, and herbs." These seem to be taken for granted. If man rules over the highest aspect of creation, the things made at the end of the week, it stands to reason that he will rule over the lower aspects, in some sense.

Part of man's peculiar domination of the animals lies in the fact that only animals can be helpers to man. Pigs can help man hunt for truffles, and oxen can pull man's plows. Dogs can guard man's home, and cats can cleanse his house of vermin. This particularly close association of men and animals is seen in Genesis 2, where God used the animals to teach Adam of his need for helpers. God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make a helper suitable for him" (Genesis 2:18). God chose to bring the animals and birds before Adam for him to name or describe. These animals were indeed helpers, and Adam could see that, but they were not helpers fitted to him.

Under the instigation of Satan, part of the animal kingdom rose up against human dominion. The serpent's seduction of Eve and Adam in Genesis 3 is the story that tells of this. After the fall of man, all animals have the potential of becoming man's enemy. Even the peaceful ox, if it rises up and gores a man, is counted an unclean animal (Exodus 21:28-29).¹ Thus, it would be necessary for the Seed of the woman to exert dominion over the rebellious animals, by crushing their head, their leader (Genesis 3:15).

A marvelous picture of this is given in Daniel 7, where the Son of Man, the Seed of the woman, takes dominion over the four beasts of the sea. The sea represents the Gentiles, and the four beasts represent the idolatrous nations of the world: the lion-eagle is Babylon; the bear is Persia; the leopard is Alexander's Greece, and the nightmare beast is Rome. The Son of Man, however, takes dominion over them all, subduing Satan's beasts permanently. Just so, Mark tells us that Jesus "was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan, and He was with the wild beasts . . ." (Mark 1:13a).² With these remarks we have arrived at a discussion of the symbolism of animals, and so to that subject we must now turn.³

Animals as Symbols

The Bible presumes an analogy between men and animals from the beginning. Animals image human life more closely than do any other of the other aspects of the creation. This is especially true of land animals, which were made on the same day as man. In Genesis 2, we find that God brought animals to Adam to name, or describe. Adam gave names to them, and in the process noticed that all the animals came in sexual pairs. He might have reasoned from this that he was simply different from the animals in this regard. Instead, however, he rightly observed that if animals had mates, he should also (Genesis 2:18-20). This reasoning could only take place on the basis of a perceived analogy.

Let us now briefly overview the ways in which the Bible sets forth animals as imaging human life. Elijah Schochet has provided a fine introduction to our present considerations, and his remarks are worth reprinting in full.

Scripture depicts God with strikingly concrete imagery. He is described in varying contexts as a father, husband, judge, king, warrior, winnower, husbandman, smelter, builder, teacher, healer, harvester, giver of rain, leader of the blind, wayfarer and stranger, as well as the shepherd of a flock. It is therefore not surprising to find God also portrayed with imagery drawn from the world of fauna.

As an eagle that stirreth up her nest,
 Hovereth over her young,
 Spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them,
 Beareth them on her pinions. (Deuteronomy 32:11)

I bore you on eagle's wings. (Exodus 19:4)

He will cover thee with His pinions,
 And under His wings shalt thou take refuge. (Psalm 91:4)

God is also depicted as a lion, as a leopard, and as a bear lying in wait for its prey (Isaiah 31:4; Hosea 5:14; 11:10; 13:7; Lamentations 3:10); and the wrath of the Lord is compared to that of a she-bear bereaved of her cubs (Hosea 13:8; 2 Samuel 17:8; Isaiah 59:11). In Balaam's orations, God is to Israel "like the lofty horns of the wild ox" (Numbers 24:8; 23:22). Now clearly, God is not being compared to the animals themselves. It is rather the *deeds* of God that are described and compared to the deeds of specific animals in particular circumstances.

Similarly, Israel is portrayed as being an unfaithful wife, a wild vine, God's servant, God's beloved, a bride, a vineyard, as well as, from the world of fauna, sheep, a wild ass, well-fed stallions, fatted cows of Bashan, a turtledove, an untrained calf, and a worm (Micah 2:12; Jeremiah 2:24; 5:8; Amos 4:1; Psalm 74:19; Jeremiah 31:18; Isaiah 41:14). By means of such concrete imagery the concept of God and His covenant with Israel was related to the life experiences of the Israelites, notably those embodied in the world of nature.⁴

God groups animals with men in certain special ways that indicate a closer analogy between men and animals than between men and any other aspect of the earthly creation. Both men and animals stand under the penalty of capital punishment for murder (Genesis 9:5). More specifically, as regards the cattle,

both were to keep the sabbath (Exodus 20:10; Deuteronomy 5:14); both were under the blessing and curse of the covenant (Leviticus 26:22; Deuteronomy 28:4); and the firstborn of both belonged to God. Additionally, the entire logic of the sacrificial system depends upon analogy between men and animals.⁵

The Mosaic revelation contains numerous laws concerning animals, such as that ox and ass are not to be yoked together, and that the ox is not to be muzzled while it treads. Commenting on such laws, Paul writes, "God is not concerned about oxen, is He? Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written" (1 Corinthians 9:9-10). In other words, all the animal laws are really concerned with human life. Not muzzling the laboring ox (Deuteronomy 25:4), in context (25:5-10), means that the levir (brother-in-law) is entitled to benefit from the property of the child he rears for his deceased brother, during the years of the child's minority. Paul applies this to pastors who care for the Church while Christ is in heaven (1 Corinthians 9:10; 1 Timothy 5:18).

In fact, if we press Paul's language, these laws did not concern animals at all, but were "altogether"⁶ concerned with human beings. Does this mean that the Jews never needed to keep these laws as they pertained to animals, but only as they pertained to people?⁷ Or does Paul's "for our sake" refer to the New Covenant believers and mean that while the Jews were to keep the "letter," Christians only need to be concerned with the human dimension? Or is Paul's "altogether for our sake" only a hyperbole of comparison? It is hard to know. One thing is clear: The primary focus of the animal laws in the Mosaic revelation is the symbolic and human dimension. According to Paul, God is not particularly concerned with whether or not we yoke oxen with asses, but He is concerned with whether or not Christians marry unbelievers.

Not all animals symbolize the same things about God and man. The Scriptures help us in seeing the precise ways in which certain animals image the life of man, both positively and negatively. This is particularly in evidence in poetry and proverbs.

Poetic allusions often emphasize the close similarities between humans and animals. When Jacob blesses his sons, he com-

pares Judah to a lion's whelp, Issachar to a large-boned ass, Dan to a serpent in the path, Naftali to a hind let loose, and Benjamin to a wolf that raveneth. Balaam's orations compare Israel to a "people that riseth up as a lioness, and as a lion does he raise himself up," and David, in his moving eulogy, laments Saul and Jonathan as being swifter than eagles and stronger than lions. Shimei son of Gera, who curses David, is deemed a "dead dog," and Hazael modestly refers to himself as a dog, one clearly unworthy of greatness. (Genesis 49:9-27; Numbers 23:24; 24:9; 2 Samuel 1:23; 16:9; 2 Kings 8:13.)⁸

There is little need to expand on this point, however, since the book of Proverbs is familiar to all readers. It is well known that the Bible draws comparisons between human beings and animals, and in particular regards.⁹ There is one special way in which some animals represented human beings, and that was in the sacrificial system. Only five animals were eligible for sacrifice in Israel: the ox, the sheep, the goat, the dove, and the pigeon. There were other animals that were clean, and might be eaten, such as deer, gazelle, and chicken, but only these five might be sacrificed (Genesis 15:9, and contrast Genesis 8:20; Leviticus 4:1-5:10; Deuteronomy 14:4-5).

Animals found their way into the imagery of the Temple (though not of the Tabernacle). Twelve bronze bulls symbolizing Israel supported the bronze sea in the Temple courtyard (1 Kings 7:25), and lions and oxen were engraved on the ten bronze water chariots (1 Kings 7:29). The choice of lions and oxen arises from the fact that they are the two animal faces of the cherubim (Ezekiel 1:10; 41:18-19).

The Categories of the Animal World

Genesis 1 provides us with six categories of animals. In terms of the wider world, there are (1) the winged fowl, (2) the great monsters of land and sea, and (3) the fish of the sea. In terms of the land, there are (4) the wild animals, (5) the creeping things, and (6) the domestic animals (cattle).

The *great monsters* are occasionally mentioned in the Bible, some of them by name: Leviathan, Rahab, Behemoth (Job 26:12-13; 40:15-24; 41:1-34; Psalm 91:13; 148:7). From what the Bible says about them, these are evidently what we today call dinosaurs.¹⁰

Birds are associated with the "heavens above." Thus, they are frequently symbols of spirits, clean or unclean. The dove can symbolize the Spirit of God, Who hovered over the creation in Genesis 1 and over our Lord at His baptism (Matthew 3:16). The dove's flying over the waters of the Flood while it receded is an image of a new creation (Genesis 8:8-12). Unclean birds can thus be associated with the demonic realm (Revelation 18:2; Isaiah 34:8-15).

Fish are associated with the "waters under the earth." In Biblical imagery, the seas are generally the world of the Gentiles. Israel is a people of the land, and throughout the Old Testament, the important people of God were farmers and herdsmen, not fishermen. Jonah traveled by sea to get to Gentile Nineveh, and Gentile Tyre is pictured as a vast ship of state sailing on the seas (Ezekiel 27:25-36). In the New Covenant, however, all is changed. The Apostles were largely fishermen. Jesus fed the crowds with fish. Paul carried the Gospel abroad over water. All this indicates a shift from land to sea, from Israel to the nations.

Domestic animals are those that live with men, and thus are somewhat dependent on man for life. They are man's closest helpers, and most closely image the life of man. Cats and dogs and sheep and cattle and horses are much more "human" than are armadillos, possums, and bears. Such domestic animals come to represent Israel, God's domestic people.

Wild animals are those that live by themselves, without man's help. Such wild animals often represent Gentiles, especially converted and ennobled Gentiles, who may not live in Israel, but who are still admirable.

Finally, the *creeping things* are those that live in the dirt. After the ground was cursed, these came to be associated with the serpent, and with evil men (Genesis 3:14, 15, 17).¹¹

Clean and Unclean Animals

What was it that made some animals clean and others unclean during the Old Covenant? Some have suggested that it was the food value of their meat, but this cannot be so. The distinction between clean and unclean was known before the Flood, when men apparently did not yet eat meat. After the Flood, God gave Noah permission to eat the flesh of *all* animals, without re-

striction as to kind (Genesis 9:3-4). It was only with the Mosaic covenant that the unclean animals were declared inedible.¹²

The distinction between clean and unclean animals, then, must be symbolic. Here again, we must be careful. It was not the overall lifestyle of these animals that made them clean or unclean. The Bible has many fine things to say about the eagle. "As would be expected, the eagle's regal appearance and superior power are frequently emphasized. The Bible describes the impressive sweep of its wings in flight, its awesome speed, and its characteristic manner of swooping down to attack its victims."¹³ Indeed, one of the faces of the cherubim is that of an eagle. Yet the eagle is an unclean animal. The same is true of the lion; indeed, Christ is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Yet the lion is unclean. The eagle and lion are every bit as unclean as dogs and pigs, concerning both of which Scripture has nothing good to say. And, unclean though the serpent is, it is used on one occasion to describe the tribe of Dan in a "flattering metaphor."¹⁴ The clean goat is every bit as disgusting in its habits as the unclean pig.

What this means is that we have to be extremely precise in determining exactly what made clean animals clean, and unclean animals unclean. It is not their general habits. It is not information from poetry, prophecy, or proverbs. It is, rather, the precise details given in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. The lion was unclean, resembling the Satan-possessed nations in only one respect: He does not have split hooves and does not chew the cud. Apart from this consideration, he is a fine and noble beast.

In fact, the primary feature of clean animals is their feet, in one sense or another. To understand this, we must bear in mind that the ground was cursed under the Old Covenant (Genesis 3:17). Men normally wore shoes, and it was ceremonially important to wash the cursed soil off one's feet before entering a house (Genesis 18:4; 19:2; 43:24; Judges 19:21; Luke 7:44; John 13:3-15). Holy ground, where the curse was removed, required men to go barefoot (Exodus 3:5; Joshua 5:15).

Bear in mind that animals are symbols of men. We find that clean land animals wear "shoes," while unclean land animals do not. Clean land animals also chew the cud, traditionally regarded as an image of meditating on God's Word (e.g., Psalm

1:2; 119:103; Jeremiah 15:16). To be clean, an animal must both chew cud and wear proper shoes (hooves that are split) perhaps so that the animal can “distinguish” between the things with which he comes in contact, and so that he can travel on high places: the holy mountain (Leviticus 11:2-8, 27; Psalm 18:33). Fish must also be shod. In their case, it means having scales. Scales are like armor that keeps the fish from contact with his environment (cp. 1 Samuel 17:5). The clean fish must also have fins, enabling him to make purposeful movement through the water. The man of God, symbolized by the clean fish, does not drift with the tide (Leviticus 11:9-12).

Clean birds are those that are careful and particular about where they land—where they put their feet (Genesis 8:9). Unclean birds will land on anything, especially on rotting carcasses (Leviticus 11:13-23).

Finally, animals that swarm around in the dust and that invade homes are unclean. They attack the woman’s domestic environment, spreading death to her kitchen utensils. The woman is at enmity with them (Genesis 3:15; Leviticus 11:29-38).

All unclean animals resemble the Serpent in the Garden. They are boundary transgressors who break into the domestic garden and bring death. They crawl in the dust. They eat dust. In these ways they image the life of the Serpent—but in only these ways. The unclean lion, as we have seen, is also a noble and mighty beast.

In the New Covenant, of course, this distinction is removed (Mark 7:19; Acts 10-11). Christ has cleansed the world, once and for all.¹⁵ We can go barefoot in the dirt, and wear shoes to church. We can eat the flesh of any animal we desire. We don’t need to break kitchen utensils when we find a dead lizard or mouse lying on them (Leviticus 11:32-35).

Conclusion

As we look at the world through new eyes, we must be careful not to bring the clean/unclean distinction into play, since we now live in the New Covenant. All the same, the meaning of that distinction is still relevant. We need to be careful to walk in the ways of righteousness and meditate on God’s word. We need to avoid the environment of the serpent.

In other regards, however, the Bible enjoins us to observe the animal world carefully, for God created it as a living parable of human life. By studying the ways of the animals, we come to understand more and more what it means to be true human beings, images of God in His world.

Let us, the Cherubim mystically representing,
And unto the Life-giving Trinity
 the thrice-holy chant intoning,
All cares terrestrial now lay aside,
That we may raise on high the King of all,
Like Conqueror on shield and spears,
By the angelic hosts invisibly upborne.
Alleluia!

The Cherubimic Hymn¹

N I N E

ANGELS

The song quoted on the opposite page is a hymn of the Eastern churches, sung at the beginning of the communion liturgy. It asserts that believers in the New Covenant are like the angels who guard the throne of God. When Adam rebelled and was cast from Eden, cherubic guardians were appointed in his place; but with the coming of the Son of Man, the keys of the Kingdom are returned to human guardians.

We have seen that heaven is a model for the earth. Since angels are the original host of heaven, it is reasonable to infer that angels are, in some senses, models for humanity. To help us come to grips with this, it is useful to reflect on the creation and purpose of angels.

The Heavenly Host

When were angels created? Because angels are associated with stars throughout the Bible (Job 38:7; Isaiah 14:13; Revelation 12:4), it might seem that angels were created on the fourth day, along with the stars. In the New Covenant, however, men are also associated with stars (Philippians 2:15; Revelation 1:20—that the stars are men here is proved by the fact that the same right hand that upholds the stars also upholds the man John, Revelation 1:16, 17). Men were created the sixth day, not the same day as stars. Thus, the fact that angels are associated with stars does not serve to indicate which day they were created.

It is most likely that they were created in Genesis 1:1, right along with the heavens and earth, in one act. This is indicated by what God says to Job in Job 38:4-8. In verse 4, God refers to the actual creation of the earth itself: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth!" He goes on in verses 5 and 6 to refer to the work of six days, the work of shaping and structur-

ing: "Who set its measurements, since you know? Or who stretched the line on it? On what were its bases sunk?" Finally, referring to the angels, God says: "Or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (verses 6b and 7). The cornerstone is the first part of the foundation, so that by returning to the cornerstone at the end of His list, God returns to the initial act of creating the earth. The angels were present to praise at that moment.

From this we can reasonably *guess* (without being dogmatic about it, obviously) that God created heaven and the angels instantly, and then created the primordial earth. Thus, Genesis 1:1 says, "heaven and earth," not vice versa, indicating not only that heaven is a model for the earth, but that it was made first.

Angels were created a host, but not a race. Angels do not marry, and new angels do not emerge as time goes along. All the angels were created mature at one instant of time. Thus, angels did not emerge from formlessness, emptiness, and darkness.

It is quite otherwise with man. Being of the earth, earthy (1 Corinthians 15:47), man is built up over time. The womb is empty until it is filled with a new man. During the nine months of pregnancy, the new man is in darkness, and is moving from (relative) formlessness to form, as Psalm 139 says,

Thou didst form my inward parts; Thou didst weave me in my mother's womb. . . . My bones were not hidden from Thee, when I was made in secret, skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth. Thine eyes have seen mine unformed substance (vv. 13-16).

While the Hebrew words used in Psalm 139 are not the same as those used in Genesis 1:2, the general idea is the same.

Yet it is the destiny of this *race* of men to mature into a holy *host*. Thus, the armies of God are spoken of as His host; and enlistment into that host at the age of twenty (Numbers 1) is an indication that a certain stage of maturity has been reached. Moreover, the fact that men are to mature from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3:18), becoming ever more glorious in time, while the angels were created glorious at the outset, again indicates that the angelic host forms a picture of the goal of human maturation: from fetal "formlessness" to "angelic" glory. Thus,

Jesus affirms that men, in their transfigured glory, are "like the angels in heaven," and "neither marry nor are given in marriage" (Matthew 22:30). Note that men are not said to *become* angels (contrary to popular mystical presentations, such as the film "It's a Wonderful Life"). Rather, men become *like* the angels.

In one sense, maturation in glory can never end, either for angels or for men, since there are always new depths and heights to God for us to appreciate and reflect. In another sense, however, there is a point at which maturity is reached; and in that sense angels serve as models for men.

Thus, the original creation purpose of the earth was to grow into heaven-likeness, and for man was to grow into angel-likeness. This natural process of growth and development, built into the Old Creation, was forever wrecked by the rebellion of man. As a result, the process of maturation took the world downhill in the direction of wilderness degradation (Genesis 4-6), and man into the likeness of beasts and creeping things (Romans 1:23; Psalm 135:18; 49:12).

In the New Creation, inaugurated at the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the world and humanity are restored to their original program. The developmental processes of the Old Creation are reestablished in the Spirit, on the basis of the heaven-attainment of Christ.

Cosmic Controllers

Angels run the world for God. This is one of the most difficult aspects of the Biblical worldview for modern men to understand, and so we should take a closer look at it. The modern view of the world is that the cosmos is run by natural forces, sometimes called natural laws. The expression "natural law" is a holdover from earlier, more Christian times. The notion of a "law" requires a personal lawgiver, and also a personal agent to obey the law. What modern people mean by "natural law" is better termed "natural forces."

At this point, most modern people are deists. They believe that God created the universe (billions of years ago), winding it up like a clock, and then leaving it to run itself. Occasionally God interferes in these natural processes, and they call this a "supernatural" event, or a "miracle."

This is not the Biblical view. Christianity teaches that God is intimately active in running His universe *all the time*. He is not an "absentee landlord." There are no impersonal natural forces at "work" in the cosmos. Bavinck writes that

after the creation of the world God did not leave the world to itself, looking down upon it from afar. The living God is not to be pushed to one side or into the background after the creation issues from His hand.²

From the Biblical perspective, a miracle occurs when God does something differently from the way He usually does it. As Auguste Lecerf has written,

The constant relations which we call natural laws are simply "divine habits": or, better, the habitual order which God imposes on nature. It is these habits, or this habitual process, which constitute the object of the natural and physical sciences. The miracle, in its form, is nothing but a deviation from the habitual course of natural phenomena, provoked by the intervention of a new factor: an extraordinary volition of God.³

Poythress goes straight to the heart of the matter:

The Bible shows us a personalistic world, not impersonal law. What we call scientific law is an approximate human description of just how faithfully and consistently God acts in ruling the world by speaking. There is no mathematical, physical, or theoretical "cosmic machinery" behind what we see and know, holding everything in place. Rather, God rules, and rules consistently.

A miracle, then, is not a violation of a "law of nature," and not even something alongside laws of nature, but is the *operation* of the only law that there is—the Word of God. What God says is the law (see Psalm 33:6).⁴

The Bible tells us that God actively "works all things after the counsel of His will" (Ephesians 1:11). In a particular way concerning the Church it can be said that "there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all" (1 Corinthians 12:6). It is true of all men, however, that "in Him we live *and move* and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

The theological doctrine that God works along with all things is known as the doctrine of *Divine Concurrence*. It means, according to Louis Berkhof,

(1) That the powers of nature do not work by themselves, that is, simply by their own inherent power, but that God is immediately operative in every act of the creature. This must be maintained in opposition to the deistic position. (2) That second causes are real, and not to be regarded simply as the operative power of God. It is only on condition that second causes are real, that we can properly speak of a concurrence or co-operation of the First Cause with secondary causes. This should be stressed over against the pantheistic idea that God is the only agent working in the world.⁵

Thus, it is God who makes it rain and snow (Psalm 104:13; 147:8, 16); God who causes grass to grow (Psalm 104:14; 147:8).

God usually does things the same way, and this enables us to go about our business in the world with confidence that the gravitational constant, for instance, will not change. The gravitational constant and coriolis force and other "forces" that are described by natural science are actually regularities that God has imposed upon Himself and His angelic agents. The covenant regularities of our present world were set up after the Flood, according to God's promise in Genesis 8:22, "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease."⁶ This poetic statement sums up the natural world, and says that as regards nature God will not change the fundamental way He does things until the end of the world. From a Christian standpoint, the study of the "laws of nature" is a study of the terms of the Noahic covenant.

Let me give an illustration that has been helpful to me in thinking about this. According to Joshua 5:12, God gave manna to Israel for forty years in the wilderness. This manna was found on the ground every morning except the Sabbath. There was twice as much on Friday morning. It rotted if it was kept overnight, except Friday night (see Exodus 16). Also, Deuteronomy 29:5 says that during the forty years in the wilderness their clothes and shoes did not wear out.

Now, imagine a child growing up in this situation. Let us assume that this child was born while Israel was encamped at Sinai. For nearly forty years, these are the only conditions he has ever known. If this man were a scientist, he might come up with some scientific "natural laws." For instance, he might believe that it is a law of nature that while some fabrics wear out, fabrics worn by human beings do not. While some leather objects wear out, shoes worn by human beings do not. Perhaps this is because human beings have a "restraining aura" around themselves that prevents wear. He might also formulate a "natural law" that says that the gravitational and tidal forces of the sun and moon prevent the fall of manna every seven days, while providing a doubling of manna the day before. Concentrations of "cosmic rays" cause the quality of the manna provided on the day before the cessation to be different, more "concentrated," so that it lasts twice as long without rotting.

It is easy for us to see that these explanations would not be valid. Our present world order, however, is the same. The "laws" that govern natural processes are actually just God's current ways of doing things.

This brings us to the involvement of angels in running the natural world. It is in the area of weather that the Bible shows angels running the world. The passages that show this are in Psalm 104 and the book of Hebrews. Speaking of God, the Psalmist says:

He lays the beams of His upper chambers in the waters; He makes the clouds His chariot; He walks upon the wings of the wind; He makes the winds His messengers, flaming fire His ministers (Psalm 104:3-4).

The author of Hebrews explains that these are references to angels, "And of the angels He says, 'Who makes His angels winds, and His ministers a flame of fire' " (Hebrews 1:7).

This means that at least sometimes angels are involved in running the weather, and carries with it an implication that angels run other things in the world also. God, of course, is *concurrently* running the world, but angels are also involved, at least sometimes. Thus, for instance, if you pull the watch off your arm and drop it into your lap, what causes it to fall? And to fall

at a rate we can describe by a "gravitational constant"? Well, first of all, the eternally active God caused it to go down at that rate, according to His provisions in the Noahic covenant. Second, it is likely that gravity-angels either pulled or pushed it down at that rate.

We need to face the fact that this way of thinking seems "primitive" or "childish" to us, but that is only because of the secular propaganda we have absorbed. God's world is a friendly world, run by Him personally and by His angels. Investigations of "natural" processes are really investigations of how God's stewards run His house.

Before the rise of modern secularism, Christian theologians spoke more freely about this kind of thing. Let me just call attention to some of John Calvin's remarks on the prophecy of Ezekiel. Calvin takes note of the fact that the angelic cherubim who drive God's cloud-chariot have four faces: the faces of man, eagle, ox, and lion. Calvin does not hesitate to say that:

by these heads all living creatures are represented to us: for although trees, and the sea, and rivers, and herbs, and the air, and stars, and sun, are parts of the universe, yet in living beings there is some nearer approach to God, and some clearer display of His energy: for there is motion in a man, in an ox, in an eagle, and in a lion. These animals comprehend within themselves all parts of the universe by that figure of speech by which a part represents the whole. Meanwhile since angels are living creatures we must observe in what sense God attributes to angels themselves the head of a lion, an eagle, and a man: for this seems but little in accordance with their nature. But He could not better express the *inseparable connection which exists in the motion of angels and all creatures*. We have said that angels are not called the powers of God in vain: now when a lion either roars or exercises its strength, it seems to move by its own strength, so also it may be said of other animals. But God here says that the living creatures are in some sense parts of the angels though not of the same substance, for this is not to be understood of similarity of nature but of effect. We are to understand, therefore, that while men move about and discharge their duties, they apply themselves in different directions to the objects of their pursuit, and so also do wild beasts; *yet there are angelic motions underneath, so that neither men nor animals move themselves, but their whole vigor depends on a secret inspiration.*⁷

As the Nicene Creed says that the Holy Spirit is the "Lord and Giver of life," so Calvin seems to have felt that life and energy were communicated to men and animals by the angelic agents of the Spirit. Calvin's interpretation of Ezekiel 1 may not be correct at this particular point, but his overall worldview is in accord with the Bible's.

Angels and Men

Now that we have a fuller understanding of the service of angels, we can see once again how they model life for humanity. We are to do God's will on earth as it is done in heaven, to act in this world as heavenly people. The angels—perfect servants of God—are thus models for us.

There are three particular things the Bible shows angels doing as models for us. First, the Bible shows angels praising God, ascribing holiness to Him, around His throne. The seraphim of Isaiah 6 sing "holy, holy, holy" to Him, as do the cherubim in Revelation 4. When the cherubim start up this chant, the twenty-four angels of the second rank take it up, and also worship God (Revelation 4:8-11).⁸ In Revelation 4, humanity is absent, still excluded from heaven. In Revelation 5, however, we watch the Son of Man, the Lamb of God, ascend to the throne next to His Father. Now at last the redeemed multitude also can join the heavenly choir. The cherubim and twenty-four chief angels begin a new song (Revelation 5:8-10), which is taken up by the whole angelic host (Revelation 5:11-12), and finally by humanity and all creation (Revelation 5:13-14).

Second, these praises constitute the hymnic throne of God. The cherubim form His throne in the Tabernacle, as He sits on their outstretched wings with His feet on the Ark, the footstool (1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Samuel 6:2; 2 Kings 19:15; Isaiah 37:16; Psalm 80:2; 99:1).⁹ When this throne becomes His chariot, we find again that He is seated above the wings of the cherubim (1 Chronicles 28:18; Ezekiel 1:4-28). Just so, God is enthroned on the praises of Israel (Psalm 22:3; 148:13), and His throne was carried on the shoulders of the Levites (Numbers 4:15; 7:9; 2 Samuel 6:3-7, 13). God's hosts thus labor for Him as His servants. By holding Him up, they proclaim Him King.

Finally, the cherubim guard the heavenly throne of God, and kill those who defile His holiness. Originally, man was given this task on earth (Genesis 2:15), but Adam allowed the serpent to take possession of his heart and was defiled. Thus, the cherubim also guarded the portal of the earthly throne (Genesis 3:24; Leviticus 10:1-2; 2 Chronicles 26:19). When the Tabernacle was set up, a curtain of cherubim separated the throne from the rest of the tent (Exodus 26:31). The outer areas, however, were guarded by armed Levites, who were to keep away sinful encroachers on pain of death (Numbers 18:3).¹⁰ With the coming of the New Covenant, the keys of the Kingdom were returned to humanity, since a Son of Man had become guardian of Eden once more (Matthew 16:19; Acts 2:3; 5:1-11).

Conclusion

The angelic host models the Church. As angels bear the throne exalted, so the Church in her preaching and life proclaims and exalts her King. As angels guard the throne, so the Church through her discipline guards God's holiness. As angels worship at the throne, so the Church worships her Lord in sacrament and liturgy. And beyond this, angels also model for us our work in the world. As angels delight to work and run God's world for Him, so should we, for in His service is perfect freedom.